



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Jesus, Who?"
(Pentecost, 2026)
"On Following Jesus" Text(s): *Matthew 16.21-28.*

□ Day #1—Monday, August 31st. Read: Matthew 16.21; Mark 8.31-33; Luke 9.22. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

Last week we heard Peter's incredible confession of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. Still, Peter still does not truly understand Jesus' mission. In Peter's mind, and in the minds of ancient Judaism, the Messiah would conquer and rule. However, Jesus has an entirely different Messianic vocation.

Having declared His person (Matthew 16.16), Jesus now declared His work; for the two must go together. He would go to Jerusalem, suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. While the scene remains near Caesarea Philippi and the story is continuous from *vs. 13–20*, the phrase, "From that time on Jesus began..." marks the beginning of a decisive new phase of Jesus' mission. Its geographical focus was to be Jerusalem, and its character was dominated by the cross. In verse 21, we read the first of three formal announcements of what is to come (See also Matthew 17:22-23 and 20:17-19). Jesus tells His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and there suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders. He would be killed. Nevertheless, He would rise again from the dead on the third day. From now on, the mission became a march to death, and the disciples had to learn to live with this new perspective.

The description of Jesus' enemies in *v.21*, "The elders, chief priests and teachers of the law," represented the three groups which made up the membership of the Sanhedrin, the supreme, Jewish council. This was to be, therefore, a full-scale official repudiation of Israel's Messiah by Israel's highest court. Yet, and again, the result of all His sufferings and death will be that He will be raised again the third day. His rising again the third day proved that He was God's chosen—the Messiah!

Matthew Henry comments on why Jesus would describe His suffering, death, and resurrection at this point of His journey. Jesus must tell His disciples:

...he must suffer many things, and be killed. His enemies' insatiable malice, and his own invincible patience, appears in the variety and multiplicity of his sufferings (he suffered many things) and in the extremity of them; nothing less than his death would satisfy them, he must be killed. The suffering of many things, if not unto death, is more tolerable; for while there is life, there is hope; and death, without such prefaces, would be less terrible...he foretold his sufferings... To show that they were the product of an eternal counsel and consent; were agreed upon between the Father and the Son from eternity; *Thus is behooved Christ to suffer.* The matter was settled in *the determinate counsel and foreknowledge*, in pursuance of his own voluntary susception and undertaking for our salvation...¹

Consider/Reflect: What activities and attitudes do you believe are at the heart of Christian discipleship? Have you ever been confused by Jesus' work in your life? What expectation (s) has changed in your relationship with Jesus?

□ Day #2—Tuesday, September 1st. Read: Matthew 16.22-24; Matthew 10.38-39. —Examine: The Text and its Message.

Peter, hearing these words, took Jesus aside and began to *rebuke* Him. Again, the disciple who had just been blessed by Jesus clearly did not fully comprehend Jesus' plan. The man nicknamed "rock" or "rocky," became a stumbling-block! Peter could not understand how Jesus could be Messiah and yet die at the hands of the religious leaders. Peter probably was so shocked to

¹ Matthew Henry. *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Logos Bible Study).

hear Jesus speak of His death that he failed to hear Him mention His resurrection. Peter's rebuke, however, brought a rebuke from the Lord in return, for Peter was playing the role of Satan. Jesus directly addressed Satan, who was seeking to use Peter as his instrument. Jesus had previously told Satan to get away from Him (*Matthew 4.10*); He now repeated that order. Peter was trying to keep Jesus from dying, but that was a primary reason why Jesus came into the world. Peter's confusion and efforts at trying to thwart the Crucifixion, as Satan had earlier tried to do (*Matthew 4.8-10*), resulted from not thinking from God's viewpoint.

Though Peter wanted Jesus to follow *his* plan, Jesus instead showed that discipleship involves a cost. Discipleship does not mean one enjoys glory immediately. A disciple who would follow Jesus must deny himself and all his/her ambitions. S/ He must take up one's cross and follow Jesus. In the Roman Empire a convicted criminal, when taken to be crucified, was forced to carry his own cross. This showed publicly that he was then under and submissive to, the rule he had been opposing. Likewise, Jesus' disciples must demonstrate their submission to the One against whom they had rebelled. The path Jesus and His followers would (and will) travel would (and will) be a road of sorrow and suffering. Nevertheless, in so losing one's life, one would (and will) truly find a better life! Jesus' similar words in *Matthew 10.38-39* were stated in connection with one's attitudes toward one's family; here Jesus spoke in relation to Peter's misunderstanding about His vocation and the cost of discipleship.

Jesus calls His disciples to be suffering servants among others. The lifestyle of God's people, the church, is to be correlated with Christ in His suffering. Discipleship means saying no to the sinful ego; it means being prepared to suffer in the company of Christ; it means giving up selfish ambition and, in so doing, finding one's true self in the fellowship of Jesus (*vs.24-25*).

Consider/Reflect: "Peter genuinely thinks he is helping Jesus when he tries to talk Him out of suffering and death. At times, we also fail to understand God's ways, thinking we know better. Jesus knows that He has to take up the cross for our salvation. Peter will learn that truth later, a truth that continues to give us comfort and peace. [Pray]: Lord, thank You for being willing to suffer and die that I might be forgiven. Lead me to speak Your Word aright. Amen."²

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, September 2nd. Read: Matthew 16.24; Matthew 4.8-10. –Explore: The background to this text(s).**

What was Peter's mistake? Like other Jewish people at the time, Peter likely understood the Messiah's work in primarily earthly and political terms; to defeat Israel's earthly enemies and restoration of the nation and reclaiming the land of Israel. With this attitude, Peter had in mind "the things of men," and as long as Jesus' disciples shared this purely human perspective, Jesus' mission, "the things of God," could never make sense to them. That is why Jesus had been anxious to dampen popular enthusiasm as reflected in *v. 20*. Here we can see the reason for Jesus' remarkably fierce reaction in *v. 23*!

Where do we find the mind of God? In the Word of God. Until Peter was filled with the Spirit, he had a tendency to argue with God's Word. Peter had enough faith to confess that Jesus is the Son of God, but he did not have the faith to believe that it was right for Jesus to suffer and die. To be fair, we can understand why Peter (and the other disciples) had difficulty with Jesus' insistence on His death, as well as His command that His followers take up their crosses!

The cross in the ancient world was a symbol of death and humiliation. If you carried a cross in the first century, it was a one-way journey—you were not coming back! Jesus' words here symbolize the decision to do the will of God whatever the cost—to go one way with Jesus. When we deny our sinful drives and rather choose God's will for our lives, we take up our cross. By that choice, we *lose* our old self, and we begin to gain the new self that God will empower us to be. By losing our (old) life, we find our (new) life in Jesus Christ. In a very real sense, to take up the cross is to set off for public execution; to deny (kill) our ego driven, self-centered focus on ME, and publicly put Jesus first in every facet of my life.

To deny self does not mean to literally hate yourself. It means to give yourself wholly to Jesus and share in His shame and death. Paul described this reality in *Romans 12.1–2* and *Philippians 3.7–10* (we will see this tomorrow), as well as in *Galatians 2.20*. To take up a cross does not mean to carry burdens or have problems (Like one's mother-in-law ☺). To take up the cross means to identify with Christ in His rejection, shame, suffering, and death. However, and this is critical: for the Christian suffering always leads to glory. This is why Jesus ended this short sermon with a reference to His glorious kingdom (*Matthew 16.28*). This statement would be fulfilled within a week on the Mount of Transfiguration, described in the next chapter.

Consider/Reflect: Where do you struggle most in surrendering to Jesus? Pray specifically about this today and the remainder of this week.

□ **Day #4--Thursday, September 3rd. Read: Matthew 16.25-26; Romans 12.1-2; Philippians 3.7-11; Galatians 2.20. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus revealed the perils of following the path of self-preservation. The divine call to carry the cross and the natural human revulsion to that call was the basis for the community instructions that followed. People tend naturally to avoid the self-denial demanded by the cross. I will say this again: to deny self means to *give yourself wholly to Jesus* and *share in His shame and death*. Another way of understanding this point is reflected in the table below. Jesus contrasted two approaches to life:

Deny yourself...	Live for yourself...
Take up your cross...	Ignore the cross...
Follow Christ...	Follow the world...
Lose your life for His sake...	Save your life for your own sake...
Forsake the world...	Gain the world...
Keep your soul...	Lose your soul...
Share His reward and glory...	Lose His reward and glory...

If it were possible for an individual, in preserving his own life, to gain the whole world, but in the process lose his soul, of what value then would be the possessions of the world? True discipleship involves following Christ and doing His will, wherever that path might lead. Choosing to take up our cross and follow Jesus is a *daily* (sometimes-constant) decision. Jesus' way leads to real life. Giving our ultimate allegiance to any-thing (or person), leads to losing our very soul.

Consider/Reflect/Pray: "Lord, give me strength to bear my cross. Lord, I surrender to you what I am holding back from you. Jesus, remove the fear that leads me to keep saving my life rather than losing myself to your love and grace. Today I choose to follow you! Amen."

□ **Day #5— Friday, September 4th. Read: Matthew 16.25-27; Mark 8.36-37; Luke 9.25. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

As was mentioned on Tuesday, another word that describes taking up one's cross is *discipleship*. Discipleship, as described in this passage, can be expressed in three ways: (1) making up one's mind to follow Jesus; (2) giving up one's autonomy and surrendering to Jesus; and (3) taking up one's identity in Jesus. An outline for this whole section includes four elements for discipleship: (1) Partnership with Christ (*v.* 24) (2) Priorities from the Person of Christ (*v.* 25); (3) Perspectives from the judgment of Christ (*v.* 26) and (4) Practices in the will of Christ (*v.* 27). As one theologian has put it, the contemporary culture teaches that the one who is happiest is the one who possesses the most. Jesus teaches that the one who is happiest is himself possessed by Christ!

The soul is the deepest aspect of the self—that which is intimately connected to God. How tragic it is to strive after wealth, power, prestige, and/or any of the "treasures" of the world above our Heavenly Father, only to be continually disappointed while life wastes away. As theologian, Eugene Boring describes...

Jesus' warning is more than just an idealistic principle. Both the context and the qualifying phrase "for me"/"for my sake" make the giving of one's life a matter of commitment to the confession of Jesus as the Christ. Those who seek to preserve their lives by living selfishly end up actually forfeiting themselves.³

Scholars also note that this passage is *eschatological* in nature. Eschatology is the study of "last things" and pertains to the period of human history when Jesus returns and ushers in the final restoration of all life. In *verse 27*, Jesus talks about His second coming and the rewards that will accompany His return. The saving of one's life now, through trying to "gain the whole world," will result in losing one's life at the end of time. Conversely, losing one's life now, through following Jesus and taking up one's cross, will result in saving one's life at the end of time.

Consider/Reflect: How does *v.26* influence the way you make decisions? Does Jesus *own* your soul? What would need to happen for Jesus to completely *own you*?

3 *The New Interpreters Bible: "The Gospel of Matthew."* (Abingdon Press, 1995).

□ **Day #6-Saturday, September 5th. Read: Matthew 16.27-28; Mark 9.1; Luke 9.27. —Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

This section closes with Jesus' assurance for His disciples. Jesus will return one day in glory and judgment. This statement was likely bewildering to the disciples, as Jesus had not left (died) yet. Moreover, if He were the Messiah, He would not need to come "back" with His Father's glory. It will be after Jesus' death and resurrection that the disciples would look back upon this statement and understand what Jesus truly meant. He will return and bring in God's *eschatological* (things concerning the end-times) Kingdom and glory.

The last verse of this section brings some questions. Who are the "some standing here" that are promised they will see the Son of Man and the Kingdom come before their deaths? Traditionally and historically, there are two interpretations. First, Jesus is describing the transfiguration which is about to occur. Peter, James and John would be given a "glimpse" of the glory of the Kingdom and of Jesus as the Son of Man and Son of God. A second suggestion is that perhaps Jesus was talking about the resurrection and Pentecost. It is through Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit, that the hope and glory of the Kingdom of God would be a visible reality for all! It was (is) Jesus who would have the last word, and those who had been faithful to Him would be rewarded. Jesus must die indeed, but before some of His earthly companions also taste death (in martyrdom?), they would see that He had conquered and was now reigning as king! As the kingdom of God grows, and the church becomes increasingly a force to be reckoned with, the kingship of the Son of Man will be established for all to see. Biblical scholar D.A. Carson makes the point well...

[I]n a host of ways, not least of them being the rapid multiplication of disciples and the mission to the Gentiles... The way to glory is the way of the cross; and the reign of the Son of Man, which 'some standing here' will see before they 'taste death,' will be inaugurated by the cross.⁴

Consider/Reflect: When and how did you come to recognize Jesus as *your Messiah*? Pray about worship tomorrow, that God will bless your worship of Him and strengthen your faith through His Word and Sacraments.

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...
New Sermon Series: "Surrender. Serving the Savior."
Scripture Texts:
Ezekiel 33.7-9
Romans 13.1-10
Matthew 18.1-20