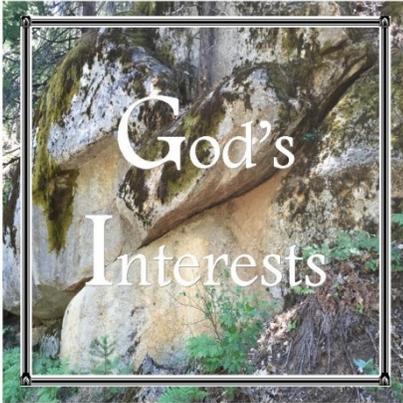


God's Interest (Matthew 16)



I was reading in the book of Matthew, the 16th chapter. Jesus had chosen 12 men to follow after Him, to learn from Him, to see His working of miracles and to hear His declaration that He was the Messiah.

In 16:3 when Jesus asks Peter **"who do you say I am?"** Peter rightly answers, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Then in verse 21 we read, **"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things... and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."**

Even after all the teaching, all that they had witnessed Jesus accomplish, the disciples still could not see the whole story. Peter takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke Him, saying, **"God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."**

Oh bless Peter's impulsive, fight for the underdog, protective little heart. Aren't we so similar at times? Always wanting to help, to fix, to protect? Because surely, pain and suffering could not be part of God's plan! I've long been a champion for the underdog, defending almost anyone without even thinking. It's my nature to want things right and fair, if there is such a thing. But the Lord didn't bless Peter for his words, and it has me wondering if I, too, often step in where I shouldn't? Do I try to control a situation, or defend the wrong thing, do I utter words to encourage when the situation is one that God is trying to use for a different purpose?

Instead of a blessing for Peter's defense we find Jesus responding with these harsh words (imagine the Lord saying these to you when you have stepped in with words, or action, that wasn't yours to give) Jesus looks at Peter and says, **"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."** I can imagine how crushing those words would have been. To be called an enemy of the One to whom you have given up your life to follow after, to be called a stumbling block to all Jesus was attempting to accomplish, to think you know the plan, only to have the plan turn out much different than expected. To be confronted with the fact that you are seeking your own interests, not the interest of God. Even as I read the words, I feel the conviction in my own spirit of how guilty I am of doing the same. How many times do I try to tell God how something should be?

We want life to be different, either for ourselves or for another. It doesn't look like we expected. It's not fair. It's not the way we envisioned it. So, even if we don't put it into words, our actions question God's plan, we question His motives, we doubt that it could possibly be the right way. But the Lord reminds us, it's not about our plans, our thoughts, our ways. God's are so much higher than ours. He knows exactly what is needed to achieve His purpose, and sometimes that requires things not being as we'd like them to be. Sometimes that requires suffering.

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Jesus' answer was, "***If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.***" Denying self, that's so very hard to do, especially when our own desires and wishes run contrary to whatever God is doing in our life, or the life of a loved one. Peter probably thought he had denied himself to follow after Jesus, he had, after all quit fishing, left his home, followed Jesus from town to town. But had he truly denied himself? Or just went along with Christ as it fit in with his own ideas? Apparently Peter had some preconceived notions of what following Jesus meant. Do we? Are we a follower of Jesus Christ simply because we have made a profession of faith? because we go to church? because we don't party like we could? It's time to ask ourselves, have we truly denied ourselves to follow Him?

The Bible tells us to encourage one another, to lift one another up, even to turn others back from their sin. As the family of God we are to care for one another, but when we don't stop to ask the Lord how and when to do that, we can end up working against what God is trying to do. Even though what we attempt may look good, it may not be in the best interest, or the overall good plan God has laid out.

In the case of Jesus, what Peter could not comprehend was that the Messiah would have to suffer and die. How could that possibly be God's will that suffering take place? We, of course, see in hindsight that it was the Father's plan of grace to provide a sacrifice that would meet the cost of our sin, and Jesus was the only One capable to pay that price. Jesus' suffering - we call it grace, we call it the gift of salvation. But to Jesus, it was His suffering.

Sometimes, things MUST happen, as Jesus shared in verse 21, even things where "God's interests" don't align with our vision of how things should be.

Before we rush in to help someone, or are quick to demand justice, we need to inquire of the Lord, what is Your will? And determine to trust His answer. As Christ did, may our denying self find us only doing what the Spirit says, knowing that God will use all things to accomplish the best in our life. His love will allow for nothing less, you get that right? His love will never allow anything than what is best for us, even when it looks upside down to our own thoughts.

Seeking God's interest can't help but change the way we will pray, it will change the way we respond in a situation when we are attentive to His leading. In fact, the most amazing thing is, seeking God's interests will change US, and that is the plan! He's able to use all things to make us "like-minded" to Him, to grow us up spiritually, maturing us until we learn to reactively trust Him in all ways. He's able to use all things to strengthen our faith and bless us with His immeasurable peace. Our God is faithful. We can trust Him in the suffering, because sometimes, things MUST happen to achieve His eternal plan. And, His plan is always for our best. May we always be women who seek God's interests!