

The Cross of Christ and The Cross of a Christian

Time and again we see the Pharisees and Jewish leaders trying to get rid of Jesus - try to catch Him in His words, discredit Him, arrest Him, even kill Him if they can, and they always fail. But Jesus tells His disciples in our text this morning that they one day would finally succeed. That one day He will suffer at the hands of the Jewish authorities and be killed. That is not what they wanted to hear! After all, in the verses just prior to our text, Peter has just confessed what God had enabled him to know and believe: that Jesus was truly the long awaited, promised Messiah! And Jesus had indeed confirmed it! **MAT 16:17 ESV AND JESUS ANSWERED HIM, "BLESSED ARE YOU, SIMON BAR-JONAH! FOR FLESH AND BLOOD HAS NOT REVEALED THIS TO YOU, BUT MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.**

"Yes Peter, you are right. I am the Messiah." The Savior they had been waiting for their entire lives, indeed Whom the Children of Israel had been waiting for since God promised Abraham that his seed would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth - that through his family line the Seed of Promise, the Seed of the woman would come and save, was now finally here!

But as you well know, by Jesus' day, the idea of the Messiah had taken on false expectations. He was understood by many to be a national savior - One Who would rescue Israel from her enemy Rome and establish her as the mighty kingdom of God on earth. All oppression would stop and all would bow before Israel's might as the world would finally acknowledge her as the people and nation of God. Finally they would be respected. Not going to happen though if their Messiah is dead!

MAT 16:22 ESV AND PETER TOOK HIM ASIDE AND BEGAN TO REBUKE HIM, SAYING, "FAR BE IT FROM YOU, LORD! THIS SHALL NEVER HAPPEN TO YOU." Certainly we can understand Peter's actions just as a disciple and friend of Jesus. Who would want one they love to be hurt and even killed!?! But Peter's desires and thoughts go beyond just brotherly love, for he, like the rest of the disciples also has in mind the false and glorious expectations of the Messiah Israel now wants. After all, being the closest followers of the Messiah, even His dear friends would obviously come with some nice benefits. What rewards and joys, power would await them? Remember, these are the same disciples (as they are walking to Jerusalem and Jesus' Passion) that argue about which of them was going to be greatest in the coming kingdom the Messiah would establish. "Far be it from you Lord! This shall never happen to you!"

Oh but Peter has way overstepped his bounds. He may mean well, but he is assuming the lordship at this point. God the

Son Jesus has stated what WILL happen, Peter says it will not happen. He has taken the place of God. He is thinking the thoughts of fallen man, which is selfish and self-centered, glory/power seeking and always opposes the will and ways of God, and is in perfect step with satan (and his plans). Peter is basically speaking as the devil. Thus Jesus responds: **MAT 16:23**
ESV "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."

The devil who of course remembers the terrible curse pronounced upon him in the garden would always work at trying to save his head and thwart the work of the Messiah/Seed of the Woman. There is no need for Jesus to travel this terrible, painful road set before Him. He once tempted Jesus in the wilderness to abandon this path of the cross, to take the easy way by rejecting the Word and trust of God. If Jesus wishes to be King, to have all the kingdoms of the world in fact, he, satan could give them to Him. All Jesus would have to do is bow down and worship him. No need for all that suffering, take the easy way. That was a dangerous temptation made by an enemy. Peter makes perhaps an even more dangerous temptation to Jesus, for it comes by a friend.

But Jesus is God, not Peter, not us, not satan. He will see that the will of God is carried out, all the way to the Cross. For He had come out of love FOR us. He had come as our substitute under the wrath and justice of God. The wages of sin is death, and that price will be paid for God is Just. But He is even more merciful and loving, sacrificially so. And thus God willed that a substitute, His own dear eternally begotten Son pay that price for us, suffer even the torments of hell itself on the Cross in our place. Death is terrible, far more so what Jesus would endure.

But Peter and the rest of the disciples were so focused and distressed by the "death" comment/thought, they had passed over or didn't catch Jesus' "and rise from the dead on the 3rd day" part! Though the prophets of old had foretold the suffering of the Messiah, including His crucifixion and resurrection, none of them had foretold this third day. And perhaps the disciples did not remember or grasp when earlier Jesus had said to some scribes and Pharisees that Jonah and his little incident with the great fish was a sign pointing to His victorious substitutionary work, and speaks of that three day aspect:
MAT 12:39-40 ESV BUT HE ANSWERED THEM, "AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION SEEKS FOR A SIGN, BUT NO SIGN WILL BE GIVEN TO IT EXCEPT THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH. (40) FOR JUST AS JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE GREAT FISH,

SO WILL THE SON OF MAN BE THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH.

Jonah who was three days "dead and buried" in the fish's belly, would then be expelled to preach and bring salvation from judgment and destruction to the people of Nineveh. Similarly, Jesus would die and be buried, and on the third day rise from the dead, accomplishing forgiveness and salvation from eternal judgment and destruction for all of mankind. Yes, death, and particularly death on a cross (and especially the torments of death eternal while hanging upon it) is a horrific thought. But it would be for nothing if Jesus did not also rise from the dead. For only then would it prove that the debt had been paid, justice satisfied and the devil would have his head bruised, his ability to accuse us of sin crushed and we would be saved and brought into the eternal Kingdom of God.

MAT 16:23 ESV 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."

Peter and the rest of the disciples needed to have their thinking adjusted - to have their minds set upon the things of God and not on the things/ways of man. To start having godly thoughts and actions, God-pleasing ways, godly living rather than following the road of the selfish, power hungry Old Adam. Or as Jesus put it, **MAT 16:24 ESV "IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME."**

This is written to Christians, those who already are alive in Him (by His gracious work in their baptism) and now of course want to follow after Him. To do so means a death and a resurrection. To die to the Old Adam/Old self/old life and rise up renewed in New Life in Christ, a new godly life lived in the renewed image of God.

To "deny himself" means the Old Adam must be denied and the new person in Christ, the one remade in His image must rise up and follow Him on a road of humble obedience and submissiveness to the will of God. By the grace and strength He gives us (at our baptism), He calls us to deny our Old Adam, drown and kill it daily, deny our desire for power over others, and instead reflect the Life, love and service God has first shown us.

Yet, when Christians live their lives in Christ and speak in His Name in their daily vocations as they have been given to do, and refuse to live as the world does, to return evil for evil, they can open themselves up to various kinds of attack and shame and harm. This is taking up the **cross** and following Him. Taking up our cross is the suffering that we experience for the sake of Christ. It is not the suffering and afflictions that are common to all of man because we live in a fallen and cursed

world. These are the suffering, persecutions that happen because we are Christian.

MAT 16:24 ESV "IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME."

When by God's grace we deny ourselves, lose this life, the Old Adam's life (of selfishness, self-centered power and control over others), then truly we find life. Indeed, God will produce fruits of life through us, the good works He recreated us in Christ Jesus to do (of service and care for our neighbor). And these works of life and love God has performed through us will be the evidence that all will see on Judgment Day.

Children of God, know that when our Lord Returns in His Glory on the Last Day, and the book of our life is opened, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. All of our sinful guilt is gone in Christ. All of it. All that remains to be seen are the good works of love and service to neighbor those made alive in Christ do - what we can't help but do in Him (He through us).

Remember, **GAL 2:20 ESV I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST. IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME. AND THE LIFE I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME.**

This is the New Life, the True Life we have now and forever more because our Lord has crucified and buried our Old Adam in His Blood and enables us to deny/suppress it and instead follow our Lord, reflecting His ways to a hostile world.

Amen