

## **As a Christian can I get it drastically wrong? Matthew 16:13-23**

I am going to start with a Question this morning:

Can a fully-fledged Follower of Christ think, speak and act like Satan in order to do the work of the devil? In other words...

as a Christian can I get it or things drastically wrong?

It is a terrifying thought. How do you feel about that?

This idea that your own mind can turn out to be your enemy in the way it thinks and rationalises your thoughts. Or, that the feelings of your heart along with your emotions could actually lie to you, even lead you into diabolical beliefs, which you would go as far as express authoritatively in front of others as a representative of none other than God's opposition party and it's leader?

Heaven forbid that this would ever happen to one of us.

It reminds me of a certain Rev Dr, Senior minister in his Parish, at a particular Presbyterian General Assembly I was attending, who at that time had an important role in the church as a Convenor of a committee. At this Assembly we were beginning the official process of writing into church regulations our stance on leadership and sexual relationships outside marriage between a man and a woman, which meant in particular for practicing homosexuals that they could not be ordained as an Elder or Minister.

Now Rev Dr believed that this view was not correct and that we as Commissioners should believe the same as him and vote for homosexual leaders to be allowed to lead in the church. He was liberal in this area and the majority of members of the influential Committee he spoke for held the same view as him, so supported him as a whole. What he did on one of day of Assembly when we were in debate and were to vote on this issue was to appear and be interviewed on Breakfast TV. I was having breakfast when I watch him say that the predominant view in the church was that practicing Homosexuals should to be allowed in Leadership and that is the direction the church will be moving. He made this view clear to the rest of the media the night before so it was in the Press that day in the paper I was reading at breakfast. Then when we came to vote on this issue he stood as the Rev Dr, convenor of an important committee and told us on behalf of his group that we all were to vote for homosexuals to be allowed into leadership. Simply this is what we had to do and how we had to vote because that is the way our church was going to proceed.... And then... eventually... we got to vote... and guess what?

The majority of Commissioners did not vote the way he had ordered us to and continued to do so on all such further related matters right up until the last day.

We were on the same flight north later that afternoon. He got off half way. I did not get to talk with him but I know that by his posture, demeanour and countenance- it said it all. In directly voting against the things he had in mind, which were not God's concerns or ways, the Lord Jesus Christ had publically told Satan where to go along with the mere human concerns- thinking and heartfelt attitudes of this man and his supporters. This man sought to be an obstacle to the Lord's Loving truth of what constitutes sin and righteousness in his community. As a result he was publically humbled, some might even say, grossly humiliated! Something he had entirely bought upon himself. Four years later though the Rev Dr bounced back as none other than the Moderator of General Assembly as someone who I believe had learnt his lesson well.

So what is it that you might harbour in your heart and mind as things born out of emotional based reasoning, human concerns that are not God's concern. If anything, what is it in you at this time that will serve to turn you from following Jesus words and concerns, his direction and your God given purpose?

Jesus has a name for followers who succumb and do this. He calls them a *stumbling block* when they speak and act having in mind merely their own human concerns rather than God's. In our bible reading today we learn how the stumbling block came to be.

These verses speak of the beginning of a new stage and emphasis of Jesus' ministry V21. Instead of teaching the crowds in parables from now on his main focus will be to prepare the disciples for his coming suffering and death. Last week he gave them what was to be their very first hint Matthew 9:15, "The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast".

From now on the time for symbols and veiled references has gone because the disciples have recognised Jesus as the Son of God. They had experienced the euphoria of knowing that their rabbi and Master was none other than the Messiah himself, but then comes the terrible revelation from Jesus' own mouth that shatters their hopes and dreams. It is hard for us to imagine the impact these words had back then and there when Jesus tells the disciples,

“I must go to Jerusalem, suffer a lot at the hands of others, be killed and raised to life again”. This may seem like heroic determination on Jesus’ part, and it is, but the main reason for going to Jerusalem and suffering is that, he is doing it in willing submission to his own Father’s will.

On the one hand Peter and the disciples have answered Jesus’ question “Who do you say I am?” that he is the Messiah the Son of the living God. But now on the other hand with all Jesus’ talk about suffering as God’s servant they could not find it in themselves to believe that their Messiah would be killed because their thought and understandings of the Messiah did not allow for this.

Which is why Peter on their behalf, so not to embarrass Jesus, he takes him aside, faces him and fronts him up with some strong language to counter Jesus’ words of “I must Go and suffer, die and be resurrected again”. Well Peter, he comes in with, “Never LORD!” “Never shall this happen to you!” Well...

How to go from hero to zero, from ‘Rock’ to ‘Stumbling Block’. Peter has got it drastically wrong, and worse than that, whom does he sound like here?

How about in the Garden of Eden, who was it said, “Did God really say... you will certainly not die...” Genesis 3:1,4. Then there was Jesus’ Temptation in the Desert [Matthew 4:8-9] where Satan had offered Jesus the position of ruler over all the kingdoms of the world including its wealth, without suffering that is, and so it was that Peter has done the same. Jesus knows full well it is the same diabolical source behind the same temptation.

So now Jesus’ turns to Peter to front him up.

“Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me...”

Satan means **adversary or accuser** (one who opposes another in purpose or act). It is the name given to the prince of evil spirits, the established adversary of God and Christ who incites apostasy, the renunciation of faith, from God and to sin. The one who gets around and outwits humans by his cunning ways.

There is also a second meaning, which is a Satan-like human.

So, who was Jesus addressing here? Peter, Satan or Both?

Jesus is not one with mere human thinking and motivation or with evil, sin and the evil one himself - the adversary and accuser....

Satan once again is definitely rebuked, along with Peter.

Remember, the devil had only left Jesus for a while when he departed from him in the wilderness, and now he was back and using a human-Satan, or in this case Peter who has been enticed, to align his thinking and words to do Satan's dirty work.

So Jesus is addressing them both. He kills two birds with one stone and makes sure that Peter knows it. One moment Peter is Rocky the heavyweight Apostle on whom Christ will build his church where the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

In the next instance, a few verses later he is a Satan-like man. The rock that has become in Jesus' words a 'stumbling block'.

Jesus thought Peter's mere human concerns were downright scandalous, in the Greek *Skandalon*, which means 'stumbling block'. It stands for anyone, like Peter on this occasion, as a thing by which you are entrapped by and drawn into sin or error. So Jesus is saying "You Peter are a trap, a snare, an impediment like a rock placed in my way attempting to cause me to stumble or fall. And further to this you're not thinking God's thoughts that 'I must go to Jerusalem and die', but a human thought 'that I must not go'. Which is quite a scary scenario with Peter having had in the earlier conversation, unlike other people, he did think God's thoughts because he had received divine revelation given from the heavenly Father. But here and now he's switched sides. That is the scary scenario- Peter both did and did not understand the truth about Jesus. The ultimate example of a Follower of Christ who can get it drastically, diabolically wrong. All because he thought and felt that Jesus dying was just a big mistake on Jesus' part and said so. He had made the mistake of getting all officious as 'the Rock' with all the authority that he believes he has to muster over his own Master, he had foolishly taken him aside to speak to him as if he could save Jesus from Himself by rebuking him. Bad decision... trying to tell God what to Do! Anyone here ever tried that? I think, I feel, I believe that I'm right and you need to do this God! When I do this God tends to reply immediately in such a direct way that I know instantly I've got it drastically wrong. Funny thing is as I acknowledge this serious truth- it makes me laugh, the Joy returns!

Could I really do anything remotely like Peter as a follower of Christ? ...and receive such a reaction from Jesus?

The answer... is a firm, Yes! If you choose to run fully on your own understanding in all ways without the consideration and concern for God's Word, God's truth along with what are God's desires and purposes for living life in this world, telling God what to do.

Then you too can earn as an adversary, a Satan-person, the official title of 'stumbling block' just like Peter. When, for instance, we apply emotional based reasoning to a situation or circumstance. This' what I think and belief because this is how I feel about this. The bible holds some keys for us to prevent us from falling into such a trap or snare.

If you are in pursuit of the well-being for heart and mind, from the book of Proverbs we learn that it is Wisdom that bestows well-being, for instance **Proverbs 3:5-6**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight*

It is Wisdom that we are to get at any cost **Proverbs 4:20-27**

<sup>20</sup> My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.

<sup>21</sup> Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;

<sup>22</sup> for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

<sup>23</sup> Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

<sup>24</sup> Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

<sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.

<sup>26</sup> Give careful thought to the paths for your feet  
and be steadfast in all your ways.

<sup>27</sup> Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Imagine if such wisdom along with the words of Jesus had been on the Rev Dr's and Peter's heart and mind before they each spoke out about their mere human concerns - that were not God's. They would have not have had to suffer their masters rebuke. Here are Jesus' words again this time from the Complete Jewish Bible.

*"Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle in my path,  
because your thinking is from a human perspective,  
not from God's perspective!" v.23*

So can a Follower of Christ think, speak and act like Satan in order to do the work of the devil?

Could I then as a Christian, get it so drastically wrong?

Let us finish this morning by asking of ourselves, "To what extent do I accept Jesus as the rejected, suffering, dying and rising Messiah into my own own heart and mind?" Let's Pray...