

## **Surrender Your Life to Christ's Purpose     Matthew 16:13-28**

You may have already noted from our Matthew 16 reading this morning that there are two distinctive parts to it. Following on from part one, verses 13-20, in which Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, there is the rest of the story. Continuing in vv23-28, where Jesus then now tells his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to complete his God-given mission to suffer and save the world by dying on the cross.

Naturally, this comes as a shock to the disciples. After all, why would God send someone to do something as ungodlike as dying? And if dying was necessary, why couldn't it be done on the battlefield instead of on a cross. It is no wonder Peter rebukes Jesus. After all, here he was, a burly fisherman who believed Jesus, but who could not understand the true purpose of Jesus' mission. He, like many of the Jews, thought that the Messiah would be a military ruler who would drive out the Romans and restore Israel to the glory days of the reign of King David.

Jesus told his disciples that he was going to lead them into battle, and they should not expect to come away unscathed. In fact, they should not be surprised if they died on the battlefield. They would be facing the forces of evil, and those forces were strong enough to wreak havoc. God would win the ultimate battle against evil, but in the meantime, his disciples could expect the fight of their lives. And, it is a fight we are still involved in today.

Peter rebuked Jesus because he took seriously his new role as the rock on which the church was built. He took his role so seriously that he thought he had a responsibility to make sure that Jesus' ministry would be successful. He thought it was his duty to rebuke Jesus, but Jesus put him in his place. Because Peter's place was behind Jesus as a follower, a role we also have to play.

Peter, just like Satan previously, tried to deflect Jesus from the way of God, just as Satan tries to deflect us from God's way today. Satan has lots of traps to put in our path, and because he is smart, he knows that the best time to trap us often comes after some great victory in our life and faith. In Peter's case, it was just after Jesus told him that he was going to be the rock that the church would be built on. Peter wanted Jesus to follow the wide, smooth road of a worldly life that leads to death and sin. But Jesus knew

he had to travel on the narrow, rough road of life with, which remains the same road we as Christians have to travel today.

Here it was, once again that Jesus wasted no time in dealing with Satan, and neither should we. Peter had fallen for the enemy's temptations of allowing his thoughts to turn inward to himself and his desires for the nation of Israel. So, Jesus moved quickly to put an end to Peter's wrong way of thinking. We must never allow the thoughts of pride or sin to linger. We must keep our focus set on God, and ask Him to reveal His perfect will to us. He knows the plan and outcome of our lives. We can trust him fully, because just as Jesus predicted his own death, He knows exactly what the future holds for us.

Jesus knew the road he would have to travel would lead to self-denial and the cross, and he urges his followers to be prepared to pay the price, and suffer the consequences, if they want to follow the same road of life. We as his followers have to sacrifice our own interests in favour of serving Christ. Our personal goals and interests have to take on a secondary importance if we want to receive eternal life. When we do, we will fulfill God's purpose of giving life. Jesus often motivated his disciples to love and good works by reminding them that He would return one day in great glory to reward all His faithful servants for whatever they had accomplished in His name, to the glory of God.

Now this concept isn't necessarily easy to understand. Spiritual growth takes place slowly. It takes a lifetime, and even as we reach the end of that journey, our understanding is far from perfect. For example, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples about the suffering that awaited him in Jerusalem, but they did not understand fully until after the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit had not yet come, so they were unable to discern the eternal aspect of the Lord. However, after they saw the resurrected Christ, they knew He was the Saviour. God's Word always bears fruit at the right time.

So we take up the cross of Jesus any time we suffer in some way for identifying with Him and His cause. "Cross bearing" does not always include affliction or persecution in general. It may mean denying what it is that we deeply desire in order to do the will of God. When we obey Him, we position ourselves for great blessing.

We can take up our crosses and know that the Lord will bear them with us.

When Jesus said (vv25-26) that those who want to save their lives will lose them and vice versa, he was right. Our world is full of examples of people who have sold their souls by using sex, drugs, money, careers, fame, power, property, possessions, or alcohol in an attempt to find happiness in life, only to be disappointed. Whatever a person is or becomes in their outward life, the particular quality of his or her soul will be the deciding factor in how he or she lives and how others experience him or her. Every few months it seems another famous person the likes of Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Amy Winehouse, Robin Williams, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, or Prince, sadly dies before their time. Seemingly having everything the world could offer, a good career, money and fame, but so often depression, alcohol and drug dependency issues, followed by a tragic death reveal the true emptiness of such a life. With God, though, there is another way. Through his life, suffering, death on the cross and resurrection, Jesus saves us by showing us the way to a life of God's forgiveness, love and grace given with no conditions and no strings attached. God provides for us the chance to live a life with a purpose from a full range of potential present possibilities.

Jesus saves us by his death, by overcoming once and for all the power of sin. Sin no longer has a death grip over us. Christ makes it clear that God will forgive the sin that we confess and from which we repent in the sincere desire to renew our lives. Christ makes us realise that we are the most precious, precious creatures in creation... creatures worth dying for.

As Jesus said, death lurks in the darkness of life. Whatever we hope to find outside of God's plan will only ever prove itself to be elusive and temporary. Only by walking with Christ on the path of goodness will we find the true fulfilment, security, and contentment we are seeking. So, if our lives are more important to us than our faith, our lives will be over. But if our faith is more important to us than our lives, we will be rewarded with eternal life. Our Christian life involves sacrifice because Jesus must come first in our lives. We are to be like Jesus, both selfless and obedient, even to the point of death to self, denying yourself yet living in Christ.

Our crosses might not lead to death, but they can lead to other forms of persecution. For example, I receive news from various channels and subscribe to a Christian magazine called “The Voice of the Martyrs”. Sources which regularly publish stories about persecution of Christians throughout the world, especially in Third World countries. Here are some headlines:

1. Over 200 million Christians persecuted or killed for their faith last year.
2. Living as sheep among wolves in Iraq
3. Numerous attacks on the Christian communities in the district of Kaduna Province, Nigeria
4. #persecutedfamily #pray #syria#Aleppo “
5. a young daughter kidnapped by a ISIS
6. Christians are forced to leave their homes: religious persecution is a significant factor in the global phenomenon of displacement

Here in our little corner of the world, our persecution might not be as severe. It could be in the form of rejection by friends or family. Our careers might be affected. All of these are a small price that we must be prepared to pay as we take up the cross of Christ on the road of life, just like Simon of Cyrene had to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha, his place of execution (Matthew 27:32-33).

What that will require will depend on our calling. We can discern that calling through prayer, reading the Bible and keeping our eyes and hearts open to see the challenges Christ sends our way. The cross that Jesus commands us to carry is the cross of submissive obedience to His will, even when it includes suffering and hardship and things we do not want to do. It is a willingness to totally, absolutely, irrevocably and finally ‘yield our lives to Him’ because, ‘we want what He wants’, more than what we want. When we take up our cross and follow Jesus, we will bring life to those he calls us to serve. In return, he will give us abundant, eternal life.

Sacrifice and self-denial are synonymous with following Christ. That is why the Prosperity Doctrine is so disturbing. That doctrine essentially says that God will bless your life, finances, business

and so on if only you believe in Him. While God has called us to the abundant life in John 10:10 and the prosperity of the soul in Psalm 25:12-13, if God chooses to bless us materially, it will only be as a by-product of putting His kingdom ahead of our own selfish interests.

**The church also needs the challenge of the cross today.**

The church as the body of Christ made up of his followers also has a cross to bear as it fulfills Christ's mission. It involves making decisions that will not please everyone within and without, such as the recent PCANZ General Assembly's decision regarding ministers in parishes conducting only marriages between a man and a woman. The spirit of the world, along with the progressively liberal dominated media, neither likes nor accepts what it considers to be such arrogant and hateful intolerance. Do today's churches offer a faith strong enough that it can command a sacrifice? Can a church in today's "me first" culture ask its people to sacrifice something for the sake of the gospel? ...even the suffering of indifference from a world hostile to Christ's teaching, along with the truth of God's Standards contained in his Word?

The pain and suffering of the cross and the spending of self for Him are a part of the Christian life. The life of self-denial and sacrifice of which Jesus spoke has been real enough for those who would follow him throughout the last 2,000 years. It has filled the meditations and prayers of saints and martyrs as well as offering rich metaphors for sacred poetry and hymns of the church.

Today we are reminded that our confession of faith has consequences and shows itself not only in public worship, but through our words and deeds in our daily lives. Peter's story reminds us that 'it is not one incident alone that makes a life!' Though we fail and fall again and again, it is the getting up that marks the true child of God. So, we offer our lives in surrender to Christ's purpose. The Spirit of Christ within us testifies to our spirit us and enables us to confess with Peter that Jesus is the Son of God. They also constantly renew in us the willing spirit that says, "Yes" to our own taking up the cross to follow Christ.

So let us do that today- Let us surrender our lives to Christ's purpose as individuals and a church and just see what Christ will do in us and through us as we reach and touch the world for him!