

“The Way of the Cross”

Matt 16:21-28

Scripture Ref: Matt 26:39; Heb 12:12

1. During our last message, we saw Jesus proclaim to Peter “...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”
 - a. And based on this proclamation an entire denomination holds fast that Peter was the first Pope, and the doctrinal position that since that time God has had an ‘infallible pope’ on the throne of the church, passed down from one man to another.
 - b. *(infallible: immune from error in expounding matters of faith or morals – always right! 100% of the time)*
 - c. The only problem with that doctrinal position is – well – Peter...

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

2. This must have been a hard moment for Peter, I mean Jesus had just made the statement “thou art Peter... and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”
 - a. I imagine Peter was feeling pretty important after that... *“did you hear that guys? Jesus gave me a new name. Stone... pretty cool huh! So what name did He give you John? He did give you one too right.... No?”*
 - b. Perhaps it even empowered Peter a little bit, I mean after that proclamation, surely he carried a little more weight than the others.
 - c. And when Jesus said that He would be killed, Peter in his new authority felt the need to counsel Jesus – give him some of that new wise “stone-man” counsel”
3. Now – I know I am taking some liberty with my characterization, but my point is this –
 - a. Peter was using worldly wisdom – thinking like a man – not Godly wisdom.
4. This tells me two things –
5. #1 - Peter could not have been the first infallible pope,
 - a. ...if he was, then his infallibility didn’t last too long!

- b. Some would say “that was before he was filled with the Holy Spirit.”
 - c. But they how was it that in Gal 2:11 Paul tells us *“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. NIV”*
 - d. Why did Paul get in Peters face? Because Peter was burdening the Gentile believers with Jewish laws and traditions, and he refused to even eat with the Gentiles.
 - e. In other words, Peter was getting infected with the leaven of the Pharisees – legalism – right at the beginning of the New Testament church! (Apparently it doesn’t take long to get off track!)
6. #2 – It answers the question *“How can a person be so filled with the Spirit in one instance, giving a word of prophecy, or praying for a healing, or giving some awesome spiritual insight...And the next day totally lose their cool, yell at their wife, and kick the dog?”*
- a. Because just like Peter, we all have the capacity for spiritual greatness when we are filled with and submitted to the Spirit of God...
 - b. And we all have the capacity to give in to our flesh, and allow it to reign such that people might think we are Satan! *(Some of you know exactly what I am talking about!)*
7. Now that isn’t an excuse to act out in the flesh... we cant look at Peter in his weak moments and think *“well Peter wasn’t perfect, so I don’t have to be”*
- a. If you follow Peter’s life through the gospels, Acts, and his epistles, you will find a man that over the years grows into a mature and faithful steward of the grace of God.
 - b. And – so should we. Folks we are not static – we are always going in some direction...
 - c. We are either growing in our walk and maturity, or we are going backwards and becoming more fleshly.
8. So – what is the secret? How do grow in faith and maturity? How can I become more like Peter in his later year, instead of those first few years?
- a. Look – there is no one ‘secret’ to spiritual growth – just like getting physically healthy and strong required a good diet, regular cardio, and strength training... having the discipline to do these things faithfully...
 - b. Growing spiritually required a steady diet of God’s word, regular prayer, worship, fellowship, service...
 - c. But there is a starting point – that is the Way of the Cross.

The Way of the Cross

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

9. **"Taking up your cross" is not enduring a physical problem, a difficult marriage, or a wayward child.**
 - a. **For Jesus, the cross wasn't something that just 'happened' to him, or something that he brought upon Himself.**
 - b. **The cross was something that Jesus willingly went to in obedience to His Father in Heaven.**
10. **Put this in context – Jesus has just told his disciples that He is going to Jerusalem, to suffer, and to die.**
 - a. **And Peter is trying to talk Him out of going to Jerusalem – and to His death**
 - b. **And you know what – that was an option. Jesus didn't have to go to Jerusalem, or to the cross**
 - c. **He made a voluntary decision to go...**

***Matt 26:39** O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*

- d. **And then – He invites his disciples, and you and I, to follow Him there.**
- e. **Let's look at this invitation...**

If anyone desires to come after Me

11. **Jesus doesn't come to us and say "*Follow me or else!*"**
 - a. **...nor does He call up a legion of angels – have them standing before us with swords drawn, and tell us '*surrender or else*'"**
 - b. **He comes and says "*if you desire to come after Me...*"**
12. **Here is God, who laid out the foundations of heaven and earth...**
 - a. **Who could collapse this entire universe and start over with His words alone**
 - b. **He sets before us the choice of eternal life, in this incredible pure and wonderful place called heaven**
 - c. **And He says "*would you like to join me?*"**
 - d. **What do you say? If your answer is "yes", then we are ready for the next step...**

...let him deny himself

13. **If you want to follow Christ – then you have to turn from yourself... Oswald Chambers calls this "*giving up your right to self*"**

- a. This is where it can get sticky for some people – “deny myself? But... what about me and my wants?”
 - b. Exactly – this could be deemed as the one most likely thing that will NOT happen in a persons life – to deny themselves
 - c. I mean really - Our whole economy is built on the premise that people will NOT deny themselves!
14. But I believe there is a deeper meaning than not buying something we want at the mall.
- a. I believe it speaks more the overall purpose and direction of our lives – what we live for.
 - b. Is my life simply a pattern of choices and actions based on what I want at some point in time –
 - i. A new car – a new girlfriend – the latest techno-gadget – a beach house
 - ii. Each one of those things bringing temporary pleasure and satisfaction, but never able to bring meaning and fulfillment
 - iii. (*I am reminded of a popular Huey Lewis song back in the 90's “I want a new drug”*)
 - c. Or, is my life aligned with some greater purpose? A destination greater than the beach, or Hawaii, - a place called Heaven!
15. Denying myself does not mean I become a monk, or swear off TV, or never go to the mall again
- a. Denying myself is making a one-time decision that instead of living for myself and what I want...
 - b. I am going to make a decision to give my life, all that I want, all that I desire, all my dreams and plans and goals, and lay them into the hands of the One who can bring my life into a place of true fulfillment and meaning...

and take up his cross

16. Taking up your cross does not mean I go to the lumber yard and make a cross, and carry it around my neighborhood.
17. #1 – It means identifying with Jesus Christ: It is at the cross that Jesus did the work that accomplished our salvation
- a. His death on the cross paid the penalty for my sin, yours, and everyone else
 - b. His death was able to pay the price because He was without sin – the perfect lamb of God.
 - c. When we place our faith in Him – what He did – Who He is – we enter into a relationship with God *through* Jesus Christ
 - d. That relationship brings us into a new reality – a new hope – a new future

- 18.#2 – it means being obedient to God – submitting my will to Him, regardless of what He asks.**
- a. Why would someone willingly do that?
 - b. Only – if they believed that what God has in store for my life will be better and more fulfilling than anything I could ever come up with – either in this life or the next!
- 19. When Jesus said “take up ‘his’ cross” – I believe that means that each of us has a cross – a plan for our lives, the will of God for our lives.**
- a. And we might at first think we have to be suffering all the time... some Christians are always acting downcast and saying “*I am carrying my cross*”
 - b. But I look at Jesus life and ministry, and His time of suffering at the hands of the Pharisees and the Romans was three days out of a thirty-three year life.
 - c. There were times of great joy – times of sorrow – times of suffering
 - d. Times of watching God the Father do great and mighty things through Him –
 - e. Times of being mocked and persecuted for His ministry
- 20. Jesus willingly took up His cross – the plan that God had for Him**

Heb 12:2 ...Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- a. Thankfully, not all are called to be crucified like Christ – although many have been (Peter one of them)
- b. But what happened at the culmination of His life?
- c. Pain? Death? Suffering? – yes – but even greater – **VICTORY! TRIUMPH!**

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

- 21. Did you know that the average man will spend 100,000 hours of his life working? 100,000 hours – that is a LONG TIME!**
- a. What do you get for that 100,000 hours? Perhaps you build up some savings, put together some investments, acquire some real estate, earn a pension.

- b. Some people are able to do exceedingly well in the course of a lifetime, building up huge amounts of wealth.
 - c. Yet one thing is for sure: We came into this world with nothing, and we will leave the same way.
22. So, what's the point? Why should we work so hard, when at the end we are no better than the guy who sat around and watched grass grow?
- a. When Jesus made the statement "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*", I don't believe He was advising us to sit around and watch grass grow.
 - b. He was leading into another incredible point of awareness, which is this: *This world we live in is only temporary. But there is another reality, an eternal reality, and what we do in this life has a direct bearing on our place in that eternal reality.*
 - c. You can work your entire life and build up great riches and wealth, but in the end if you are not connected to the eternal reality of God, it will mean nothing!
 - d. What a tragedy it would be to live your whole life working for green money – and in the end find out that it worthless in eternity (like the guy that had gold stuffed in his pockets when he died)
23. I have seen enough to know...
- a. Those that live for self – there is always some aspect of their lives that are falling apart
 - b. Those who I see with joy, and abundant life – they are following Christ

28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

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