



Matthew 16:21-26

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

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ 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." ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Things can change quickly. You're on a road trip. The tank is full, the music is playing, the weather is perfect, and you've seemingly got the whole interstate to yourself. And then, suddenly, that unmistakable thump-thump-thump sounds from the back right wheel well. And you're stuck on the side of the road.

Things can change quickly. It's a perfect evening with your spouse. The kids are in bed, the favorite show is on TV, the ice cream is out. And then, suddenly, a child wanders into the room. "I don't feel very good." And then he proves it all over the carpet.

Things can change quickly! One moment, the Lord is singling you out in praise, the next moment, you're *Satan*, trying to tempt and trap the Savior of the world.

Poor Peter. That's where he found himself. He had made that inspired declaration, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** (Matthew 16:16) And ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!"*** Jesus had said. ***"You are Peter... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matthew 16:17-19) Peter must have felt like he was soaring, head way up there in the clouds. But when he finally started to come back to his senses—"what's all this?" Jesus is in the middle of explaining His Messianic gameplan: "We're going to Jerusalem. I'm going to suffer. I'm going to be *killed*. Three days later I'll rise."

Peter knew this was not right. *Messiahs* don't suffer. *Messiahs* don't die, particularly if they can see the danger coming and can avoid it. And Peter's the spokesman now, he's the one who has Jesus' ear, so he takes Jesus *by* the ear and *reminds* Him that *Messiahs* don't suffer and *Messiahs* don't die. ***"Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."*** Peter *rebukes* Jesus. And Jesus calls Peter, ***"Satan."***

Clearly, things can change quickly. They did for Peter. They often do for us. And in almost every scenario when things change quickly, it's not the changing circumstances *themselves* that are the problem. Not really. It's the expectations that *we* have that are *shattered*—that's where the trouble lies. Things aren't going according to plan—that is, according to *our* plan. Things aren't going the way we think they should.

And that was *absolutely* Peter's problem, too. ***"For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man,"*** Jesus said. "You're not thinking *God's* way, you're thinking *man's* way." That was the problem. That's *always* the problem. Peter, and the rest of the disciples with him,

had plans for Jesus, plans for the Messiah. Plans involving a Messianic throne, seats of honor for His friends, fire and brimstone for His enemies. Their expectations were of glory and power and honor—and with one mention of death, Jesus had shattered every expectation. Even though He also promised a third-day resurrection, none of them seemed to notice! How could they? They were still hung up on the suffering and dying part.

So maybe that's why, after Jesus is finished with Peter, He says, ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*** If *"anyone,"* He says. He's talking to the disciples, but He doesn't say, *"If you"*—He opens it up! If *anyone at all!* *"Is there anyone who will follow me this way? Is there anyone who will deny Himself? Is there anyone who will take up his cross and follow? Is there anyone who is ready to lose his life? Is there anyone who is ready to stop thinking man's way and starting thinking God's way? Is there anyone at all?"*

Now, I *wish* I could stand up and raise my hand and answer that call, ***"Here am I. Send me!"*** (Isaiah 6:8) But I cannot. As much as I want to jump out of this pulpit and give Jesus that good answer and hear Him say, *"Blessed are you, Sam, son of Dave"*—I can't pretend that I'm any different from Peter. I cannot pretend that I'm *any* different from *Satan*-Peter. Because I'm not. I think *man's* way.

I've had a lot of pastoral calls since I became a pastor nine years ago. I've returned a lot of those calls, and I've accepted my fair share too. Every call consideration process is agonizing, really, because you have to take a very hard look at yourself. At your ministry. At your gifts. At your failures. At your strengths and at your weaknesses. You have to sit down and look at all the things that you generally don't have time to consider in the busy day-to-day, all the things that you are usually *happy* to ignore. But you sit down and you look at these things, and you weigh and consider these things, and the failures and the weaknesses start to weigh heavily and you start to wonder whether you should be a pastor at all. If you return the call, you say, *"I've got to improve at these things."* If you accept the call, you say, *"This is a fresh start, I'm going to start being better at these things."* At least, that's been *my* experience with calls.

And I can tell you, after many such call consideration processes—my list of weaknesses remains *unchanged*. The list is easy to come up with these days, for me. It's predictable. It is *dreadfully* consistent. Not once have I found myself being able to move one of those weaknesses over to the strengths column, because *I* remain unchanged. I seem to be *impervious* to any substantive change.

And you are no different. You and I, we are humans, which means we think like men. We are *unchanging*. We *always* have our minds set ***"on the things of man."*** We think *man's* way. And in this context, thinking *man's* way is to run from any cross that might come near our path and continue on in the way that *we* want to go! Thinking *man's* way is to choose the way that maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain. Thinking *man's* way is to choose the way that keeps friendships alive, that protects our careers, that avoids awkward conversations. Thinking *man's* way is to shun suffering and to avoid death. And this is how *we* think. This is how we *always* think—dreadfully consistent, minds set ***"on the things of man."***

All of this means that it is so very hard to ***"come after"*** and follow Jesus. It is so hard to deny ourselves. So hard to take up the cross. Just consider Paul's list describing the Christian life of following

Jesus that we heard in our Epistle: ***“Love one another with brotherly affection. . . Live in harmony with one another. . . Repay no one evil for evil. . . so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*** (Romans 12:10, 14, 16a, 17, 18)

Who can do such a thing? Is there *anyone*? Is there *anyone* that can love *everyone* with brotherly affection? Is there *anyone* that can live harmoniously with all? Is there *anyone* that repays evil with good? Is there *anyone* that does everything He can to live at peace with all? Is there *anyone* like this, anyone who has forsaken man’s ways and focused entirely on God’s ways? Is there anyone *at all*?

Yes, of course, there is One. And there is *only* One. There is *only One* who is ready to deny Himself. Only One who is ready to lose His life. And it wasn’t just *anyone*—it was the *only One*. The *only-begotten* One. Only Jesus could set His ***“mind on the things of God.”*** Only Jesus could forsake man’s ways and choose for Himself, entirely, *God’s way*. And He made that choice again and again and again.

Jesus’ response to Peter, ***“Get behind me, Satan,”*** might make you think of Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. Satan had said, ***“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*** (Matthew 4:3) Now, there’s certainly a bit of “prove it” baked into that statement. As in, “I’m not sure you’re really the Son of God. If you are, why don’t you prove it? It’s a simple proof, if you’re really God. Make bread!”

But there’s also something more. There’s also this element of, “If You are the Son of God, why are You out here *starving* in the *wilderness*? You’re the *Son of God*, aren’t You? Messiahs don’t suffer! You don’t deserve this!” And while that temptation was ineffective on Jesus, it is *very* effective on us. That’s almost *always* how we view the crosses along our path. “I don’t deserve this! This isn’t how it’s supposed to go! I’m not supposed to suffer! Why do bad things happen to good people? Why is this happening to me?”

If there was ever *anyone* who could have asked, “Why is this happening to me,” and had a valid argument—it was Jesus. Only *one* time in human history has something truly *bad* happened to someone who was *only good*. And He *chose* to go that way. He chose *God’s way*. He made that choice again and again and again, right up until the very last time when Satan came yet again and laid the old trap once more: “Messiahs don’t suffer. Messiahs don’t die. There has to be another way.”

But the obedient One, the One who set His mind on the things of God and thought God’s way, the only faithful One who constantly denied Himself—He rejected that temptation, stepped over that trap, and followed God’s way out of Gethsemane, through the Praetorium, and all the way to Golgotha. Jesus went God’s way the *entire* way—to the cross and to the grave. And then the third day, just as He promised, He was raised. Things can change quickly.

And tied into this—His death and resurrection—things *still* change quickly. Ordinary water becomes a fountain of everlasting life. Simple bread and wine become the means that deliver Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Children of Satan who only want to go their own way and who only set their minds on their own things—these are reclaimed and redeemed, even declared to be saints of God and heirs of His Kingdom. And that’s you and me. *We have been* changed quickly.

So, set your expectations accordingly. Set your expectations on the *highest* good—an invitation to the heavenly banquet, a seat in the heavenly kingdom, a room in the heavenly mansion. Set your expectations here, and your expectations will by no means be shattered. For your salvation is the direct result of the Son of God setting His mind on the *things* of God. And your salvation is just as certain as Christ rising from that three-day prison.

Other things may still change quickly, in your life. But when they do, don't be surprised. And don't fight back against them. Don't hold on too tightly to those things that are subject-to-change. Jesus says, ***"What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"***

Just like Peter, you are Jesus' disciple. Today, He's calling not just *anyone*—He's calling *you*. Which means that you can expect plenty of crosses to bear. But through them all, Jesus will be teaching you to lose yourself and to follow Him. Now, that's not a one-and-done type of deal. It's a *lifetime* of learning to lose yourself.

And like Peter, you are going to flounder through many failures and stumble into far too many traps. But by God's grace, there *will be* a fresh start to follow every one—new forgiveness every morning. That's how God's things work. And for you, your Savior will assuredly keep doing God's things. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.