

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Cross Precedes the Crown Matthew 16:21-24

The cross is a symbol of Christianity, though I fear for the vast majority of people it has lost its meaning. For many it has simply become an ornament to be worn around their neck, or to be placed onto church buildings as an architectural statement. The cross needs to be seen as more than just an ornament. We need to see the terror and the power of the cross

What do I mean by terror? All we have to do is to consider the process of crucifixion superficially in order to understand the terror of the cross. In Christ's time, criminals were nailed to a trunk of a tree with a rough branch as a crosspiece. Nails and pieces of rope were used to hold victims on the beams while they struggled to stay alive. Eventually unable to lift themselves any longer on the nails which secured them to their cross they would die of suffocation. There are those in our society today who believe execution by lethal injection or electrocution would constitute "cruel and unusual punishment." Those living in the times of Christ who were personally familiar with crucifixion as a means of execution would find this perspective somewhat humorous. Cicero writing about crucifixion said that the victims often became raving maniacs and had their tongues cut out so that people would not have to listen to their vain and piercing babbling. The cross in the time of Christ was not an ornament, but rather an instrument of torture and of death. It was upon a cross that Jesus died. It is to the cross that He invited His disciples to follow Him.

This might all seem very morbid. But we need to understand that though the cross of Christ was an instrument of torture and death and a source of terror it would also become the path to unleashing divine power to break the back of the power of sin. It was through the cross that Christ would ultimately sit on His throne in glory with a victor's crown.

Peter needed to learn this. He had to come to understand that the cross was not simply an object of terror, but would become a means of power.

How was the Lord going to help him to come to a new understanding? First of all by forewarning them of the events that were about to take place. This is what we will see Christ attempting to do in the passage we will be examining this morning.

Peter had just experienced one of the happiest moments of his life in **Matt. 16:13-19**

Very ironically having concluded this high point in Peter's life we are immediately introduced in this Gospel to one of Peter's saddest moments in **Matt. 16:20-24**

To help us to understand Peter's failure, we will be looking at this passage from four different perspectives.

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Christ's Perspective

Let us read **V. 20** “**Then he warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.**” Why would Jesus do this? It would seem that rather than discouraging people from sharing the fact that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, that He would have been encouraging people to do this. Well let me ask you a question, What would happen if in fact they shared what they had come to know, what would have taken place? People would have expected Jesus to overthrow the yoke of Rome and set up the Millennial Kingdom. This is what the Jewish people had mistakenly come to believe. The unanimous consensus of all Jews, as far as we know, from the various Jewish writings of that period, was the Messiah would come as a conqueror and then set up his messianic reign.

Though this was the expectation, it in no way reflected the events that would be very shortly taking place. There was an ever growing pressing need for the followers of Christ to understand the complete message. Jesus, clearly in the situation we are examining this morning, felt it was now time to not only make sure that the disciples understood who He was, but what He came into this world to do. Jesus did not want only the message concerning His person to be right but He wanted the message concerning His work to be right also. And we will see that this was no easy task. We will begin by looking at **V. 21**.

V. 21 “**From that time Jesus Christ 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 be raised upon the third day.**” Jesus had alluded to His death at various times earlier in His ministry such as in **Mt. 12:39-40** and even again here in **Mt. 16:4** but Jesus in these earlier allusions to His death and to His resurrection was obviously vague. He is not so here. He is very clear. He is very specific and to the point. Note how specific Jesus is:

1. He must go to Jerusalem
2. He must suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes. These three groups compose the ruling council of the Jews know as the Sanhedrin.
3. And be killed and raised up on the third day.

All of what Christ shares with His disciples at this point is totally unacceptable to them. This was not what they had expected and it certainly is not what they want. The thought of a suffering Messiah was unfathomable for them. Just as it would be for the multitudes. This was not a strategic move on Christ's part if Christ was seeking the support of the multitudes or even His disciples. Though not strategic it was however biblical.

Is. 53:1-8 How could people have missed this truth? How could even sincere people like the disciples miss this truth? It was expedient for people to ignore this truth. It was more comforting for them to have a hope in a victorious earthly king who would deliver them from worldly woes, than for them to have a bruised and broken Savior who would deliver them from their sins.

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And being unable to reconcile these two apparent conflicting images of their Messiah, they just conveniently ignored the image of the suffering Messiah. The people of the day were more preoccupied with the political bondage of Rome than with the spiritual bondage of their own sin. Who wants a Messiah who will be humiliated on a cross? Certainly not the masses and certainly not the disciples, and certainly not Peter.

Peter's Perspective

Let us look at **V. 22** “**And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God, forbid it, Lord, this shall never happen to you.”** Peter found Christ's statement so staggering that he thought he should use his newfound honor to actually rebuke his Master. For all of his spiritual insight, he simply could not fathom why Christ, his Messiah, would have to subject Himself to such humiliation. Why would Christ have to die? And even if He had to die, why would He have to die a violent death?

There is no doubt that Peter was motivated out of a sincere and deep love for Jesus. In fact, his actions are very understandable. Often, well meaning friends give us unscriptural, and harmful advise! Sometimes we have been encouraged to rationalize our disobedience by listening to those who love us but lack wisdom. Perhaps we've broken promises, tolerated secret sin or told a lie, all because obedience seemed so painful. Our friends who don't want to see us suffer have encouraged us to avoid the painful duty that lay in our path.

Peter's reasoning is understandable, it seemed so inappropriate that the Son of God should be so grossly humiliated. How can a divine Christ die? If He is the Son of God, King, and Messiah, how can He also be a helpless victim, shamefully suffering a violent death, even death by crucifixion. All this might be understandable and even reasonable from a human perspective, but Peter's perspective was all messed up.

Clearly Peter did not realize that by encouraging Christ to cancel Easter, he was making his own salvation impossible! If Christ had taken Peter's suggestion, Peter, like all the rest of us, would have been lost forever. For there outside Jerusalem's city walls, Christ would hang naked as our sin-bearer. Without the cross, there would be no crown.

Peter rebuked Jesus, but now he in turn was rebuked. Jesus told him that his suggestion was satanic! The best of motives can be no substitute for obedience to the will of God, even when that plan includes suffering.

The Father's Perspective

God had a very special plan for His Son just as we read in **Is. 53**. Peter's rebuke of Jesus had placed him foursquare against the plan of God. As a result Jesus forcefully responds. Let us read **V. 23** “**But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests but man's.”**

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Peter the rock, had become a stone over which Christ was tempted to stumble! Unknowingly, Peter had laid a satanic snare for Christ!

Satan in **Matt. 4:9**, after showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, said to Him, **“All these things will I give You if You fall down and worship me.”** Jesus could become an earthly king without suffering on the cross. Peter in essence was picking up on the same theme. The voice of hate in Matthew 4 and the voice of misguided love in Matthew 16 were in unison.

We should not assume that this was just a coincidence. Indeed, Satan is able to put ideas into our minds that we may very well think are our own. We see this clearly demonstrated in **Acts 5:3** when Peter was confronting Ananias and Sapphira with their sin He says to them, **“Why has Satan filled your heart to lie against the Holy Spirit?”** If we are going to walk in the truth we must arm ourselves with the Word of God. Searching it’s pages and understanding it’s truths. For any of us here this morning to treat the scriptures indifferently is only inviting Satanic attack and spiritual failure. Just as we see here in the case of Peter.

Peter had failed to understand the purposes of God for His Son in spite of the fact those purposes had been clearly stated in Old Testament prophecies. Peter in effect had become the very tool of Satan to again attack the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus perceiving this to have taken place, confronts Peter with the words, **“Get thee behind me Satan!”** The disciple who only wanted to express love for His master has now suffered by far the harshest rebuke that he had ever experienced up to that point in His life or would after this point. One of the happiest moments in his life had now become one of the saddest.

Peter had failed to understand Christ’s work and as such diminished the work of the cross. He was certainly not the last to do this.

Our Perspective

Our society and even people attending our churches can unconsciously be minimizing the cross of Christ.

(1) It is done by wallowing in guilt. The word “guilt” carries with it the concept of deserved punishment or payment due. When Christ died on the cross in our place, He suffered the punishment we deserved and He paid the debt that we owed. That is why **Heb. 2:17** says **“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.** When did Jesus as our high priest make propitiation for sins? It was at His cross. In **Heb. 10:9-10** we read **“then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Thy will. He takes away the first in order to establish the second. (10) By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”** Anyone who chooses to wallow in guilt, rather than by faith trusting in the finished work of Christ on Calvary diminishes His work, diminishes His cross. But someone may say, “but aren’t there some sins that are simply too heinous to be forgiven.” The answer is no!! It doesn’t matter whether your sins are small or big.

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All sins have been paid for at the cross. In **I John 2:2** we read **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.”** Jesus died for the sins of Nero, Adolph Hitler, Charles Manson, Jeffrey Dahmer etc. etc. etc. Certainly this does not mean that everyone in the world is saved, but it does mean that they can be saved if they simply come to Christ and place their trust in Him as their Savior and their Lord. There is not a sin that was not paid for at the cross. No matter what sin you may have committed, it has been paid for. For anyone to continue to believe that this is not so, diminishes the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Someone at this point might say, “Fine I will come to the cross of Christ, empty myself of all guilt and then go my way and live my life just as I have always lived.” This is totally unthinkable.

(2) It is impossible for us to come to the cross of Christ and unload the guilt of our sin without replacing it with another load. Look at **Matt. 16:24** **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me.”** This request by those who come to the cross of Christ in order to find deliverance from the guilt of their sin will not have any problem at all doing this. In fact it will be quite natural. In order to understand this we first of all need to understand what it means to “take up our cross.”

What does it mean to take up our cross?. It does not mean that we go nail ourselves to a tree. It also does not mean that we live with bad health, an irritable marriage partner, or some other calamity with an accepting attitude.. Those kinds of crosses are common to all people in the world. To carry our cross for Christ means the renunciation of self-will; it means that we give up all attempts to be the center of our own life. To carry our cross means that we humbly submit to the supremacy of Christ. As Christ submitted His will to the will of His father and took up His cross, we are to submit our will to the will of Christ and take up our cross. Why would we very naturally want to do this?

Perhaps you have heard the story of the man who operated a drawbridge for a train. As the train was approaching, he began to lower the bridge, so that it would be entirely horizontal by the time the train approached. But as the bridge began its descent, he noticed that his own son was caught in the gears. Instantly he had to choose; to save his son would mean that the train would be derailed and hundreds of people killed. With inexpressible anguish, he continued to lower the bridge, crushing his son beneath its weight. That day as the train sped across the bridge, people waved at the watchman, not knowing how much they owed him!

Today people go merrily on their way, not knowing what they owe the Lord. But this is not so for those of us who have come to the cross of Christ. We do know, and it is natural for us to express our gratitude to the Lord by wanting our lives to be pleasing to Him. In other words, it is natural for us to be willing to take up our cross. Someone at this point might accuse Jesus of being a sadist.

Why in the world would He want us to follow Him in taking up the cross? For the very simple reason that just as this was the way to blessing for Him, it is also the way of blessing for us. Look at **V. 25** **“For who ever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.**

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Conclusion

In one day Peter was shaped by a wonderful affirmation and promise, he was also shaped by a searing rebuke. Both were needed to chisel a rough stone, so that he would become a man of God and a fruitful apostle.

With Peter we must learn the cross precedes the crown.