

"Terms and Conditions Apply"

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2022 Chronological Bible / Matthew 16:21–28

Engage

Many of you know, that aside from being born in a place beyond my control, I claim the small town just to our north to be where I'm from. And for all the jokes about that place's education quality, which by the way, most of them are uncomfortably true, there was quite a bit of learnin' going on in Natalia. I remember that in the fifth grade I learned the importance of reading everything completely that was given to me.

In my fifth grade math class, every Friday our math teacher, Mrs. Callaway gave us a quiz. I don't ever remember them being more than like ten questions, but every week, she passed them out with the encouragement that we read the quiz closely and completely. Well, one Friday in the middle of the year, some of us in my class *learned* a lesson and others of us *earned* a lesson. Did you know there's a difference between learning a lesson and earning a lesson? Those of us that learned a lesson did just as Ms. Callaway asked... we read the entire quiz sheet, put our names on the top, and turned the quiz in to her desk.

The others that earned that lesson put their name at the top and got after it. And man I tell you, I saw some of my best friends working on that quiz so hard that I could see the steam coming out of their ears...one buddy was gnawing on the side of his tongue...I even saw another kid slip his shoe off because he ran out of fingers and needed some toes. These kids were working hard! And they kept after it until they got to the last question and I remember just sitting there as I watched defeat set in upon my friends. They read question number ten that said, "Do not answer any question. Put your name

at the top of this paper and turn the quiz in at my desk. You've earned a hundred because you followed directions. If you answered any of the other questions, then you've failed."

That's a tough lesson to learn, isn't it? But it only serves to illustrate how we can be really bad at paying attention to the details.

Another example, in 2017, 22,000 Londoners who signed on to the city's public WiFi agreed to 1,000 hours of community service with each of their logins. Now, that was a more subtle lesson than the one the same IT people responsible for the public WiFi in London taught their users a few years prior when, in agreeing to logon to the WiFi, users actually checked a box that agreed to the following: "I agree to assign my first born child to the city for the duration of eternity."

Some of you may be thinking you'd give them the kids and let them keep the WiFi, to boot.

Tension

But the fact of the matter is, whether in my fifth grade math class or in the documentation we're presented in contracts or on our phones and tablets and computers, we really don't pay close enough attention to detail. Those friends of mine in math class just assumed that day's quiz was like every other. Those Londoners assumed that they just needed to keep clicking next until they got the internet access they were seeking after. In all those instances, they didn't read the terms and conditions and that cost them each dearly. *I should pause to share that no first born children were actually assigned over to the city of London.*

Have you ever asked yourself the question, "Man, I wonder what I've agreed to every time I've come to this screen?" If you're like me, that's the screen you see right after you've updated your iPhone that you've trained your thumb like a laser-guided missile to lock on and

hit the Agree button without even blinking.

Here's the thing though... A quiz in the fifth grade on a Friday makes for a spoiled weekend. Giving your first born for WiFi gives you a good chuckle. 1,000 hours of community service...maybe isn't as funny. If we're so quick to skip over the details on insignificant things, is it also possible that we may be at risk of missing the details of matters with eternal impacts?

"Whoa, preacher, that got serious real quick." Yeah, this is serious because eternities are at stake. There is no other option for eternity aside from Heaven or Hell. And the detail of significance here has everything to do with how we respond to who Jesus is.

Truth

As we find ourselves in Matthew 16 this morning, since we left off last week, Jesus has continued to go around the country preaching about the kingdom of God and performing miraculous works. Since he was misunderstood by those religious scribes and his earthly family, Jesus has still been misunderstood by many. Religious leaders are fearful of him. Many come to him just wanting something about their life to be improved. Jesus has also gathered to himself those who he is directly discipling, teaching them specifically about the Father and the kingdom. One of these that he has called to be a disciple is named Simon Peter, who is referred to in Scripture by that name or just simply, Peter.

Now, if you refer back to your Bibles, in the section that comes just before this morning's text, you'll find an interaction recorded by Matthew that takes place between Jesus and these disciples. Jesus asks them in Matthew 16:15 "...who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks the same question I've asked us to keep in our minds and it's Peter who pipes up to answer that question in Matthew 16:16 that Matthew gives to us as "Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the

Son of the living God.”” And as we read beyond that, we see Jesus congratulating Peter for answering correctly that Jesus is indeed Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. So this is a detail for us to be aware of as we begin to consider this morning’s text - Peter believes that Jesus is the Messiah. That’s got to be a good thing, right? Even Jesus was pleased with the answer.

The Way of the Messiah is Marked by a Cross

After that interaction where Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, Matthew tells us that the nature of Jesus’s teaching to his disciples changes. If Peter and the rest of the twelve knew anything about the expectation of the Messiah, it came from the Jewish understanding of Messiah which meant unadulterated glory. Yet once the twelve knew that Jesus was this Messiah, Matthew 16:21 “...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.”

In other words, what Jesus began to show his disciples rocked their boats. The expectation that Jews had for their Messiah was that God would provide for them a king who would bring God’s blessing to the nations of the world. This was shaped in part by an oracle of the Lord in Isaiah 11 that foretold of the Promised One who would descend from King David and I will remind you that King David’s father was named Jesse as we read this:

Isaiah 11:1-5 **ESV**

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears

hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Now, Peter was a fisherman before Jesus called him to be his disciple and we can safely assume that he had an understanding in his mind of what the Messiah ought to do. The Messiah was to be a descendant of Israel's greatest leader! That meant restoration of Israel to its heyday! And for Peter and the rest of the disciples, when Jesus started talking about suffering and being killed and whatnot, that didn't sound much like the success of yesteryear.

I doubt that there was a super spiritual version of rock-paper-scissors about who was going to rebuke Jesus for this teaching, so much as Peter takes it upon himself to correct Jesus on some of these details. Why not, right? Peter's the guy who just got the gold star from Jesus because he knew that Jesus is the Christ. And no sooner has Jesus wrapped up his telling the disciples what awaits him then Peter catches him on the way out of the door and in a sense, puts his arm around Jesus and says what amounts to, "You know Jesus, you've been doing and saying some great things. I'm really grateful that I've been able to witness it all. But I've got to tell ya, this stuff about suffering and dying, there's no way that'll happen. You're the Christ, remember?"

And though he came as a friend who knew something about Jesus, we discover how little Peter truly knew about God's Messiah.

Look with me at Matthew 16:23 as we see Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke. Notice, Jesus doesn't say something like, "Thanks for that feedback." Nor does Jesus say, "I know that teaching was edgy, so I'll go over my notes and come back to the group with an apology if I need to correct anything." No, Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me,

Satan! You are a hindrance to me.” And like Peter, we might be taken aback by that. “Hey man, I came to you in love. Why are you calling me Satan?”

Here’s why: When Jesus tells Peter that he’s a hindrance, the word in the original language literally means “stumbling block.” So in other words, Jesus is telling Peter that the suggestion that God’s Messiah doesn’t need to suffer and doesn’t need to be killed to claim God’s glory is a temptation on the order of what Satan promised Jesus in the wilderness. You remember that event, don’t you? It’s detailed for us in Matthew 4 where three times Satan tempted Jesus to submit to him and if Jesus would, Satan would give him the whole world.

See, for Peter and the disciples then and for even many today, the cross continues to be an unexpected and unfathomable message. I mean, think about it, if God is God, why couldn’t he just snap his fingers and fix everything? Or, if he was to send someone to be creation’s Deliverer, why couldn’t that Deliverer come and conquer Israel’s enemies and reign? Why must God Incarnate, instead of these things, be crucified?

It’s because the way of God is not the way of this world. God would not use power as we understand it to accomplish a lasting redemption, but where sin brought death into this world, God willed that life would come through death. John records for us that as Jesus is teaching about the Messiah’s suffering and death, that Jesus says, John 12:23-24 “23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Take for instance, this grain that’s over head. It’s a single seed of corn. I think we each know the value of what can come of just this one seed. Ears and ears of roasted corn at fall festivals, cans of corn to go with supper, and delicious cornbread. And beyond what goes

in our bellies from this single seed, we also know that so many more seeds come from just this single seed. Yet this single seed has no value if it's put in a jar or set in a picture frame or in some way just left for everyone to appreciate. For this seed to have value, it must be buried in the ground, going the way of death. And as the seed goes into the soil and dies, it makes new life. And from one single seed, the life that comes from its death multiplies without end.

The Father sent Jesus the Christ to the cross and there would be no escaping the necessity of that cross where Jesus died for God's redemptive purposes. And Jesus went to that cross in agreement with its need because he came so that you and I might have life and have it abundantly. Lives as abundant and rich and life-giving as fields of cornstalks without end. Yet the way God would go about providing this abundant life for those who would follow Jesus is through a humiliating cross. N.T. Wright says that the death of Jesus on that cross "was not simply the messy bit that enables our sins to be forgiven" and then can just be simply forgotten. Wright says that the "cross is the surest, truest, and deepest window on the very heart and character of the living and loving God."

The Way of a Disciple is Defined by His Cross

And if the thought of God's Messiah suffering and being killed didn't challenge the disciples enough, Jesus tells the twelve that the life of anyone who would come after him would be shaped by the cross, too.

This is a challenging word to the disciples and it should be a challenging word for you and I to hear. It's challenging because it comes right against the way so many might approach their understanding of faith in their own lives. It should challenge those of us who have an understanding of salvation that involves simply *accepting Jesus into our hearts* and has no call to follow a Jesus who

was crucified. It should challenge us who have a view of Jesus' work that's limited to wiping clean the record against us but demands no loyalty to his Word and his mission.

The call for a disciple of Jesus to pick up their cross is a call to deny oneself, and in that, the disciple's cross-bearing is not an attitude of the mind, it's about doing actions. What sort of actions? Well, Jesus tells us about them in Matthew 16:24-27. We know so well from John 3:16 that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..." and in that giving of his only Son, that giving meant that the Son would stand in the place of every sinner and take upon himself the wrath of God every sinner is due for their own sin. God would do this so "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." This mission of Jesus to go to the cross was God's intentional act to make a way for men and women who are dead in their sin to receive life.

So for someone who would claim to be following Jesus, Jesus is teaching that to follow him means that their lives are to be shaped by his cross, too. And that does not mean just holding an attitude of hating yourself or being disgusted with yourself or even trying to eliminate yourself from view, but it means that the call of the life of the disciple is to follow Jesus in mission and ministry wherever he leads.

And friends, if you're still with me, this is heavy. We just saw Peter tell Jesus that God's Messiah has no business being involved with the suffering and death that comes with a cross. Do you think he's raising his hand to apply the cross to his life? I'll give you a sneak peek: he's doesn't understand it through the time Jesus is crucified because Peter will deny any association with this Jesus of Nazareth just hours before his death. Peter would act to save his life only to come to learn later that he had lost it.

If you're following along with the church's Bible reading plan, this

Saturday we'll read about those disciples we know as the wonderful sons of thunder, who when Jesus is teaching about his suffering and death and glorification, these guys just want the best seat in Heaven's throne room. They wanted power as the world understands it and they wanted it for themselves.

What they did not understand is that those who follow Jesus are to turn away from self-promotion. There's no room for a disciple of Jesus to make much of themselves. And, they are to turn away from trying to acquire status. In the day of this text, status came to kings. To those who were closest to the king and his power. And to those who possessed wealth. And though in our times kings are not what they once were, we're just as drawn to pursue the influence of power that was given to these ancient kings and the influence that comes with wealth.

Over and against the systems and structure of this world, Jesus teaches that those who would follow him are to take the role of a servant as Jesus does. Those who would come after him are to be active participants in a Christian community that is not defined by whether there's a title for you where you can think, "oh how wonderful, I'm finally chair of this influential committee and now I can really get some things fixed around here." No the call of a disciple is to be an active participant in a Christian community that restores relationships, forgives, and seeks out those who have strayed and those who are most vulnerable.

Application

I started our time by inviting us to think about those terms and conditions that we overlook because I wonder how many of us have missed the radical call to discipleship that Jesus makes. I did that because I believe God's Word that declares that God 2 Peter 3:9 "is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all

should reach repentance.” I did that with the firm confidence that there are many people who think they deserve heaven because they “accepted” Jesus or because they prayed a prayer or because they walked an aisle. And here’s the thing, hell is gonna be filled with people who thought they deserved heaven. Yes, you heard me right - hell will be filled with people who thought they deserved heaven. Jesus taught about the cross and he taught about the resurrection and both of those events are absolutely opposite of what the world understands. The cross represents humiliation and defeat, yet in God’s power, the cross flips the script in that it is the place of Jesus’ glory and victory. Death and the tomb represent the finality and end of life, yet in God’s power, the resurrection flips the script in that Jesus is raised as the firstborn from the dead and death is given its deathblow. No longer does sin’s curse have a grip on life! And here’s the thing, the call of the cross-shaped life for the disciple of Jesus is not a call to a new form of law. There’s no good news in a teaching that results in the need to look at ourselves in the mirror each morning and convince ourselves that we’re disgusting or that we’re garbage so we can be coached up to serve others. Yet when the Holy Spirit impresses upon us the truth that Jesus is Lord of all and that he literally rose from the dead, then we know...we trust...we believe...that God does transform death to life. And he begins to transform the lives we live in him. And that transformed life knows that Heaven will be filled with people who believed they deserved hell and that in the new life given to them, they do not live to satisfy themselves...they don’t. They don’t because they have become slaves to a perfect Master who lavishes love and grace upon them. And as God pours his love and grace into us, we come to see that the call upon our lives isn’t about doing more, but living lives that are found in him shaped by Jesus’ cross.

Inspiration

And friends, we are intended to live the abundant life in fellowship with one another. The early church lived life together with needs of others in view. They surrendered the comforts and security and individual needs of the world to pursue authentic worship and growth, ministry and mission, and the welfare of all. The vision of what we can be as a community who lives life shaped by the cross is portrayed in Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 ESV

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Action

I've received sharp rebuke when I've taught what that picture of the early church conveys. I've also heard many "yeah, but's..."

- "Yeah, but what committee would do that?"
- "Yeah, but we have a program in the church that covers that..."
- "Yeah, but that's not the American dream..."
- "Yeah, but what about my retirement? My possessions?"

I'll leave you with two quotes and these apply to us across every age and every stage of life:

- Indian Philosopher, Bara Dada: “Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians, you are not like him.”
- Matthew 16:24 “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”