

Exodus 3:1-15  
 Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45  
 Romans 12:9-21  
 Matthew 16:21-28

## THE SON OF MAN IS TO COME WITH HIS ANGELS



Two weeks ago we discussed how Jesus, nearing the final days of his ministry, took his disciples north to the district of Tyre and Sidon in an attempt to retreat from the crowds and prepare the disciples for what was coming. But his fame had spread far beyond Judea and Galilee, and, in the words of Mark, *“He entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid”* (Mark 7:24).

So Jesus *went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee* (Matt 15:29), and again he could not escape the great crowds coming to see him, and for the second time he fed thousands of them (Matt 15:38).

Still wishing to be alone with his disciples, Jesus then went north to the district of Caesarea Philippi, where (in last week’s lesson) he asked the question every person must answer, *“Who do you say that I am?”* Peter answered, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matt 16:16). Jesus affirmed Peter’s words, but ended by strictly charging the disciples *to tell no one that he was the Christ* (Matt 16:20). He needed more time to spend with his disciples. They knew who he was, but they did not yet comprehend (or were not willing to believe) what he came to do. They were still far from the truth, as we will see in today’s lesson.

Matt 16:21-23. *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. <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.”<sup>1</sup>*

- *Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem* (v.21). He told them plainly, and would tell them at least twice more, that he would be killed, and in three days rise. Why did Jesus wait until so late in his ministry to show his disciples that he must suffer and be killed? (See John 10:14-18 for example.)

And why did Jesus say he must go to *Jerusalem*, as if he had an appointment there to keep? One answer to this is in Luke 13:33: *“... for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”*

Jesus did not give any reason here for his suffering and death, but he did later. In the following sayings of Jesus, where do you first see evidence of the *reason* for his suffering – the real intention of his life?

Matt 17:10-13. *“... Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.”*

Matt 17:22-23. ... *“The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

Matt 20:17-19. ... *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

Matt 20:25-28. ... *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

- *“God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you”* (v.22). Peter’s expression *“God forbid!”* was regrettable. The cross, instead of being something God would forbid, was at the center of his plan for the salvation of mankind. It was the only way. The disciples did not yet see this, and neither do many today.

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV.

- “*Get behind me, Satan!*” (v.23). These were words of disappointment rather than anger. Jesus dismissed Satan in the wilderness with “*Begone, Satan!*” (Matt 4:10). Satan was sent away because, in his diabolical pride, he would never submit himself to God. Peter was not sent away. He was told his place was not in front of Jesus but following him with the rest of the disciples, including you and me.

Jesus was grieved because his friend, who had just heard the voice of the Spirit and announced, “*You are the Christ,*” was now listening to other voices. We all do this. Eph 4:30 says, “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” If you ignore the voice of the Spirit and listen to the other voices (and there are plenty of these today), you grieve the Holy Spirit.

- “*You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men*” (v.21). Neutrality is not an option. If a person is on the side of men, he becomes a hindrance to progress in the kingdom of God.

How was Peter a *hindrance*? How was he now tempting Jesus as when the devil “*took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them ...*” (Matt 4:7-10)?

Matt 16:24-28. Then Jesus told his disciples, “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. <sup>28</sup>Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*”

- “*... let him deny himself ...*” (v.24). It’s important not to isolate the act from its *purpose* here. You may deny yourself something today in anticipation of riches or success later on, but the subject here is the struggle in the heart of every Christian, which lies in denying one’s self *in order to follow Christ*.

In each of us there are things we find hard to deny – hard to give up in order to be a disciple. Spiritual evils are especially difficult. Things like pride and covetousness, and even hatred and cruelty, are hard to deny (not permit) in ourselves as we try to follow and obey Jesus. “*I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,*” Paul wrote, “*But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members*” (Rom 7:22-23).

My life, and your life, and the life of every Christian involves denying this “other law,” which amounts to struggling against one’s own self on account of love for Christ and our desire to obey him. How do you persevere in this struggle? You do it by knowing the struggle is not yours alone. Paul realized this when he wrote in Phil 2:12-13, “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” Thanks be to God that it’s a joint effort!

- “*... and take up his cross and follow me*” (v.24). Suffering is part of life. If you are *following* Jesus, and the trail gets steep, it helps to stay close to him. And you are asked to help others along the way. The Bible says, “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2).

- “*For whoever would save his life will lose it ...*” (v.25). What sort of *life* would Peter have “saved” if he had not denied himself in order to follow Christ? Too bad we all can’t be given visions like those given to Ebenezer Scrooge in *the Christmas Carol* – visions that would make us see and realize what our own lives would be without Christ – before deciding one way or the other!

- “*For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?*” (v.26). All this brings us back to the original question Jesus asked, “*Who do you say that I am?*” (v.15). Because if you believe the material world is all there is, you are not thinking in terms of “forfeiting” or “saving” your life. But if you believe, as Peter believed, that Jesus is who he claimed to be, then there is every reason to respond to “*Let him deny himself and take up his cross,*” and follow him to the end.

- “*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done*” (v.27). For the disciples, the suffering and death of Jesus, as well as his rising from the tomb, were in the future. For you and me, the only part yet to come is in this verse. If you have Christ as your Lord and Savior today, you have his assurance that for you, “the best is yet to come!”