

Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-24-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 16:21-28

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of 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, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of 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, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

Using the words "from that time on..." Matthew indicates that Jesus' speaking about his coming passion, death, and resurrection marks a turning point in the gospel. Jesus' words about his coming time in Jerusalem presents a stark contrast to what Peter and the others probably assumed Jesus had in mind as "the Messiah and the Son of the living God" (see the Confession of Peter—Matthew 16:13-20—which we looked at last week). In Peter's mind, Jesus' entering Jerusalem would be to, in some sense, reclaim the city—a triumphal, perhaps even militaristic conquest. Jesus' insistence that he had to go and suffer and be killed must have seemed to Peter like Jesus was giving up before he even started his mission. It is no wonder, then, that he exclaims, "God forbid it, Lord!" and refuses to believe what Jesus is saying.

23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

This is a striking change, as Simon Peter goes from being called "Peter"—rock—in the last story to being called "Satan"—adversary—in this passage. There are echoes in this verse from the story of Jesus' being tested in the wilderness (Matthew 4). During that encounter, Jesus rebuked the devil, saying "away from me, Satan" to express his rejection of the devil's empty promises of earthly power and riches. At issue in Matthew 4 and here in Matthew 16 is this: What does it mean for Jesus to be Son of God? Satan calls that into question in Matthew 4, saying, "If you're God's son, command these stones to become bread"—i.e., "If you're God's son, use your power to serve yourself and provide for yourself." Likewise, Peter here urges Jesus to use his divine status as God's son to avoid

suffering and death. In both cases, Jesus avoids the stumbling stones set up for him by adversaries. His phrase, “Get behind me” calls to mind Jesus’ call of Peter and Andrew (Matthew 4:19): “Come and follow behind me”—the Greek phrase “behind me” (*opiso mou* in Greek) occurs both in Matthew 4:19 and here in Matthew 16:23. Both times it is addressed to Peter. So Jesus is not sending Peter away as he sent the devil away in Matthew 4:10). Rather, he is reminding Peter of his place as a follower and his role as a disciple. Peter’s proper place is following behind Jesus rather than telling Jesus what to do. In contrast to last week’s story when Jesus blessed Peter because Jesus’ identity was revealed to him “not by flesh and blood but by the Father in heaven,” here Jesus tells Peter he is setting his mind not on divine things but on human things.”

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

This section (vs. 24-28) contains five different sayings of Jesus, all of which are interconnected by the theme of present suffering and uncertainty and future vindication and glory. This first teaching connects again with the theme of discipleship mentioned above. Jesus makes more explicit his focus on his disciples following “behind him.” Those who wish to follow Jesus must literally do so—even if it means walking the way of the cross. The focus on self-denial will become clearer in the following verses.

25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

In the first part of this verse, “saving one’s own life” means selfishly preserving one’s life despite the cost. Here, “losing one’s life” means to forfeit the essence of one’s self. Jesus’ point is that one can end up betraying him and the gospel he came to bring in trying to stubbornly cling to one’s own prosperity and well-being at all costs.

In the second part of this verse, “losing one’s life for my sake” means following in the way of Jesus, despite the cost to one’s own self or life. Here, finding one’s life means participating in Jesus’ coming resurrection. Here, Jesus is saying that if one dies faithful to him and the gospel, that death will not be the end for that person.

26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

Here, Jesus seems to be saying that if one betrays the call of the gospel and turns away from faith in order to gain many goods or riches or comfort or health or wealth, such a decision is of no ultimate benefit. In essence, one would have traded away eternal treasure for earthly treasure.

27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

Here, the reminder is that suffering is not the end. Jesus suffered on the cross and died, yet he was vindicated and raised up on the third day (as he said he would in vs. 21). The suffering Son of Man also becomes the righteous judge at the end of time. The implication is that those who endure suffering with Jesus will also rise to eternal reward and righteousness with Jesus. At the same time, those who have fallen away or worked against the kingdom will be dealt with also in God’s good time.

28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This verse has often caused confusion and consternation because the most natural way to read this passage is “some of the disciples would not physically die before Jesus’ second coming at the last day.” Obviously, such a second coming did not happen within their lifetimes. In order to resolve this seeming inaccuracy, we might explore what is meant by “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Although this most naturally refers to Jesus’ second coming (especially in light of v. 27 right before this verse), it could also refer to the Transfiguration (which occurs right after this passage), the crucifixion/resurrection, or Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit onto the church. Even if Jesus or the early church were inaccurate in the chronology of the second coming of Jesus (remember, even Jesus himself in Matthew 24:36 assured the disciples that nobody—not even the Son—knows when he will return) it doesn’t make the assurance Jesus gives here any less valid. He clearly intends this verse to encourage his followers to be faithful

in their discipleship. Therefore, the promise that he is coming soon and we may live to see such a day should encourage us even today to be firm in our faith.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. How do we in the church today struggle with what it means for Jesus to be a suffering servant rather than a mighty conqueror?**
- 2. In what ways are you tempted to “save your life” such that you might in fact lose the essence of who you are as a follower of Jesus? In what ways are you called to “lose your life”—that is, give yourself away—and, thus, find your true life in Christ?**
- 3. What do Jesus’ promises in vs. 27-28 mean to you? What does it mean to you that Jesus promises he will come and repay everyone for what has been done? What does it mean to you that Jesus promises some of his followers will not taste death before seeing him come in his kingdom?**