

Jesus Reveals His Death and Resurrection
Matthew 16:21-23
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Matthew 16 is focused upon Jesus' teaching of His disciples. He has turned from the *"evil generation"* who are represented by religious leaders who have rejected Him (Matthew 16:1-4) and warned His disciples to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:21-23 builds upon the statement from Peter that Jesus is *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16). Because of this declarative statement of recognition, Jesus delivers further revelation to His disciples.

Jesus' revelation (16:21)

Jesus had spoken in somewhat veiled terms of His impending death earlier in Matthew's gospel:

"Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast'" (Matthew 9:14-15).

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38).

"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, SO will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'" (Matthew 12:39-40; cf. 16:4).

Matthew had earlier informed his readers that *"the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him"* in Matthew 12:14.

Now Jesus detailed a much clearer description of what lay ahead of Him to His disciples. Matthew introduced this development in Jesus' revelation with the phrase *"from that time,"* which was used previously in Matthew 4:17 to introduce Jesus' public ministry. This is then the second significant turning point in Christ's ministry, as He will describe His death and begin to explain the ultimate purpose of His incarnation.

Specifically, Jesus describes the location, intensity, and perpetrators of His death, including His ultimate victory over death. He *“must go to Jerusalem”* in order for these events to take place, since this is where *“the elders, chief priests, and scribes”* reside. That He *“must go”* reveals the will of God in His death, along with His willing participation in His death. He was not captured and brought to Jerusalem against His will but He chose to go to the city.

If He was not willing to *“suffer many things...and be killed,”* He would have avoided Jerusalem since He knew the religious leaders in the city were plotting His death. This willing subjection to the will of God in the crucifixion will become an essential part of Christ’s righteous obedience to His father in His atonement for the sin of all of mankind. Hence, traveling to Jerusalem is an important part of the crucifixion narrative.

Jesus spoke these words in Caesarea Philippi, which was around 105 miles from Jerusalem. The remainder of Jesus’ travels will head in the direction of Jerusalem, where He will arrive in Matthew 21. Luke’s Gospel puts a greater emphasis on Jesus’ intention to go to Jerusalem for the remainder of His work on earth, *“When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:51).

Jerusalem is more than the capital city and the center of the religious life of the nation. It has a history of opposing God’s people. Jesus will say *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!”* (Matthew 23:37). Thus it is only fitting that the Messiah suffer and be killed in the city of Jerusalem. Indeed, Luke 13:33 adds Jesus’ words, *“for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem.”*

This is the first of four times where Jesus will describe His impending death and resurrection (cf. Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2). That He *“began to show His disciples”* about His future informs us that this revelation to the disciples was a process. Explaining about the culmination of His ministry in the atonement begins in Matthew 16:21 and will continue throughout His remaining days on earthly ministry.

This likely is why Jesus does not stop at teaching His disciples about these things, as we see in Mark 8:31, *“He began to teach them,”* but *“He began to show His disciples”* these things. Mark 8:32 expands on Jesus’ teaching the disciples by adding *“And He was stating the matter plainly.”* With the dramatic confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the time for veiled references to His future had ended and a more straightforward description had begun.

The plain explanation of what He told them is practically identical in both Matthew and Mark's account, and both are quite specific. In addition to His statement that He must go to Jerusalem, we learn that *"He must suffer many things."* This suffering is not only physical, but is emotional, social, and ultimately spiritual. The religious depictions of the death of Christ have historically emphasized His physical suffering in the crucifixion. Therefore the other aspects of His suffering have been diminished.

There is no question that Jesus endured awful physical pain in the crucifixion. The Romans practiced crucifixion for the very purpose of creating painful death as a tool to keep its subjugates from rebelling. This horrible nature of this type of execution was well known to the Jews since the Romans would conduct them in public places, as we see with Jesus' crucifixion.

However, the gospel writers do not describe the physical nature of the suffering of Jesus in any detail. The crucifixion is simply stated as *"and they crucified Him"* (Mark 15:24). The emphasis on the pain of the crucifixion is from the tradition of the church, rather than from the words of the Scripture. This is particularly true in Roman Catholicism.

Furthermore, the crucifixion of Jesus was not the most horrible physical pain ever experienced. In fact, even with those whom Jesus was crucified with, He did not suffer as long as the other two men, for Jesus died before the other two did (John 19:31-33). The crucifixion began at the third hour, at 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25), and Jesus breathed His last breath at the ninth hour, at 3:00 p.m. (Mark 15:34-37). God the Father was merciful in His only begotten Son in reducing the amount of physical suffering.

We see the emotional suffering of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, *"And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me'"* (Matthew 26:37-38).

We see the social suffering of Jesus many ways, including:

1. Jesus was deserted by His disciples. *"Then all the disciples left Him and fled"* (Matthew 26:56).
2. Jesus was mocked at the trial before the Sanhedrin. *"Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him"* (Luke 22:63).

3. Jesus was mocked at the trial before Pilate. *“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him”* (Matthew 27:27-31).

4. Jesus was mocked at the site of the crucifixion. *“Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads”* (Matthew 27:39). *“In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him”* (Matthew 27:41-42).

5. Jesus was crucified alongside criminals. Luke 23:32-33 states that Jesus was crucified with two criminals, giving the impression that Jesus was also a common criminal. This was prophesied by Isaiah over seven hundred years earlier, *“and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many”* (Isaiah 53:12).

This suffering from mocking can be summed up in the word “shame” from Hebrews 12:2, *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* The word of God makes special note of the shame suffered by Jesus.

In addition to the physical, emotional and social suffering of Jesus, the most significant of the many sufferings of Jesus was the spiritual suffering of Jesus. This is seen specifically in the atonement of Christ for the sin of man. In *“bearing the sin of many”* (Isaiah 53:12), *“the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him”* (Isaiah 53:6). This occurred at the ninth hour, when “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ that is, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’” By bearing the sin of man in the atonement, Jesus suffered the penalty of sin, which is separation from God the Father. This was the greatest suffering of all.

All these sufferings were sourced in the actions of the elders and chief priests and scribes. While none of them personally hammered the nails, they were together responsible for these events. The Pharisees would be included as part of the elders and scribes, while the Sadducees would be connected to the chief priests. These three groups make up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish rulers of the people.

Being killed was necessary not only for the atonement, but also for the resurrection. Christ would be *“raised up on the third day.”* This fits with what Jesus had told them earlier about the sign of Jonah, *“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’”* (Matthew 12:39-40). This length of time was not only to connect with the account of Jonah, but to also prove that Jesus was truly dead.

Peter’s rejection (16:22)

The disciples had a hard time understanding what Jesus had been telling them. Peter’s private rebuke of Jesus shows that he did understand that Jesus’ prediction of His death was literal. But Peter obviously overlooked Jesus’ words about being raised up on the third day.

Peter, like everyone else in Israel, had no thought that the Messiah would be put to death, in spite of the prophecy by Isaiah in Isaiah 53. Therefore, Peter began to rebuke Jesus. The use of the word “began” implies that Peter had more to say than what was recorded by Matthew, but that Jesus interjected to stop him, as recorded in the following verse.

Peter used very strong words to voice his objection to Jesus, *“God forbid it.”* The following negative declaration, *“This shall never happen to you”* is used in John 4:14 and John 6:35 when Jesus speaks of those who come to Him who will never thirst. Also, it is used in Hebrews 10:17, *“their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”* This negative expression by Peter was completely opposed to the revealed will of God.

This serves as a remarkable contrast to Matthew 16:16, where Peter declares that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* In spite of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, Peter nevertheless believes that He knows what is best and is God’s will better than Jesus does. Peter follows his great recognition of Jesus with a great rebuke of Jesus.

This failure by Peter is indicative of people today who reject the revealed will of God because they believe that they alone understand what is best. Men have their ambitions, goals and plans and find great difficulty in submitting their desires to the Lord’s interests. It is hard to embrace the possibility of what seems bad in the short term may well be far better in the long run.

Jesus' rebuke (16:23)

As strong as Peter's rebuke of Jesus was, the rebuke by Jesus of Peter is even stronger. Jesus response can be divided into three parts:

1. *"Get behind me, Satan!"*

Jesus' exclamation to get behind Him is not a call to follow Him from behind, but rather should be understood in the same way as the same Greek verb (HYPAGO) was used by Jesus in addressing Satan in Matthew 4:10, where He said, *"Go, Satan!"* This is more than to demand a departure, but rather to get out of His way. Jesus' plan was set and Peter's exclamation was a stumbling block that was in the way.

Jesus refers to Peter as Satan only in the sense that His words were the will of the evil one, rather than the will of God. Satan means "adversary," and Peter's statement was adversarial to God's will. Peter's words were so misguided that they were ultimately from the devil, whose goal was to oppose Jesus through any means necessary, even His disciples.

2. *"You are a stumbling block to Me"*

Peter's name was used in Matthew 16:18 in a play on words for "rock." Peter's name meaning "rock" is now Peter becoming a stumbling block. Peter's words serve as a similar temptation to Satan's temptations in Matthew 4:1-11, to cause Christ to stumble in His mission the Father had appointed for Him.

Just as Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world without suffering, so Peter is seeking for the same thing. The concept of a Messiah without suffering is an obstacle to God's will. *"We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block"* (1 Corinthians 1:23). The Messiah must be crucified to fulfill His role of Redeemer.

3. *"For you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's"*

Peter had gone from thinking God's way in Matthew 16:16, to thinking in man's way. He was setting his mind on man's interests by rejecting the will of God that Jesus had just revealed. God's interest was the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah. Man's interest was to avoid this. Man's interests are notoriously short-sighted and earthly focused. What seems like the best way from a human perspective is often misguided. *"There is a way which seems right to a person, But its end is the way of death"* (Proverbs 14:12).

Conclusion

Matthew 16:21-23 is a dramatic revelation of the will of God in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The people of Israel never considered their Messiah to be the suffering servant as Isaiah 53 describes. They only hoped for a conquering king. But regarding their greater need for forgiveness of sins, Jesus made it clear that *“He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer...and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.”* This was God’s plan to bless mankind.

Peter, as the representative of the disciples, could not imagine the death of Jesus being the will of God. In spite of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, he still was unable to accept His statement. He remained bound to the thinking of the Jewish view of what their Messiah must be like. Peter’s rebuke of Jesus opposed the will of God and deserves the strong rebuke from the Lord.

This rebuke of Peter will lead Jesus to teach all of His followers what the true meaning of following Him meant. It requires a full willingness to submit their will to God’s will. They must not hold to their previous thoughts but must become a true disciple, a learner who accepts the truth of God and will yield to this revelation.

In His focus upon teaching His disciples as His earthly ministry drew to a close, Jesus will next detail what being a true disciple of Christ means in Matthew 16:24-28. This will become fundamental to what being a follower of Jesus requires, for the cross will not only be what Jesus must endure, but it will apply to His followers also. The disciples will be learning this lesson going forward.

When Peter penned his first epistle, suffering was a major emphasis. Indeed, no other epistle mentions suffering as often as Peter does. He considered those who suffer to be blessed, *“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed”* (1 Peter 3:14). He knew that God had a good purpose for our suffering, *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing”* (1 Peter 4:12). And Peter taught that we can have great confidence that the Lord will deliver us, *“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you”* (1 Peter 5:10).

Submitting ourselves to the will of God, even when it does not align with our preconceived goals, is an essential part of living the Christian life. In doing so we can trust that we will be delivered by the Lord, *“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God are to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”* (1 Peter 4:19).