

## You Have To Lose To Win

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Two services

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*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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" Matthew 16:21-26*

I recently read the story of a Russian man who was born to atheist parents, that is, people who did not believe in God. He grew up in an atheist town and attended an atheist school. He had never in his life heard the truth about Jesus Christ.

But somewhere along the way, he saw a picture of a man who had died on a cross. He never forgot that picture. But more than that, he often wondered why he seemed to be strangely drawn to that picture. He wanted to understand it. At first, he thought that the man must have been a very bad criminal. Then he thought maybe the man had been persecuted by others.

Eventually he met someone who was a Christian and knew about the picture. The Russian man asked the Christian to explain it to him. The Christian was able to do that, and finally the Russian man knew what the picture was about. The picture, of course, was of Jesus' crucifixion. The explanation that the Russian received was another step in his learning about Jesus and coming to believe in Jesus as his Savior. ("Crossbearing"-Michael Walther-[www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com))

Isn't it amazing the things that God uses to draw people to himself? In this case, he used a picture of a cross. But he uses many other ways also.

Jesus had several important things to say about the cross in our Gospel reading today. The time had come when Jesus needed to tell the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.

This was not well received by the disciples. The Apostle Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. He said, "Far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you." But Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Commentators on this reading suggest that Peter and the disciples probably never even paid attention to the last part of what Jesus said here because they were shocked with the first part. Jesus said he was going to be killed. No way could that be allowed to happen! When has anyone conquered by being killed? It made no sense to them at all.

So Peter tried to show that he had Jesus' back. Jesus could count on the disciples to see that this wasn't going to happen. Well, he needed to get ready for another shock. Jesus took Peter to task. He said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Some commentators believe that Jesus may have been speaking to Satan as well as to Peter. Satan may have been subtly influencing Peter here. Keep in mind that Satan had already made efforts to get Jesus off the track and wreck God's plan of salvation. Satan had tempted Jesus several times in the wilderness earlier in Jesus' ministry.

But whether Satan was trying to influence him or not, Peter bore some responsibility here. Peter may have been thinking something like this: "We'll take care of those elders, and chief priests, and scribes. No way are they going to kill you, not with all the friends and followers you have. We'll teach 'em a good lesson!" Plus, Peter seemed to have missed something really important - that Jesus had said he would be raised from the dead.

But while we are talking about Peter here, we may also be talking about ourselves. Sometimes we are more mindful of the things of men than of the things of God. Sometimes we think things are best resolved by a power struggle or a good fight. Sometimes we question God's ways with our sinful, flawed minds. Are we sometimes too quick to speak when we really should be listening more carefully? It would be well for each of us to examine ourselves on such matters.

But Jesus is not done speaking about the cross. Probably the main teaching of this chapter follows in Matthew 16:24-25 when he told the disciples: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Christianity is a religion of paradoxes. There are some statements in the Holy Scriptures that might seem at first glance to contradict themselves, but on closer examination they are found to be true.

I read Matthew 16:24 many times before I became a pastor. To me, the Lord was telling us what we needed to do to be a disciple. But according to Dr. Jeff Gibbs in his commentary on chapter 16:24, that understanding of it is not correct. Dr. Gibbs says that Matthew 16:24 DOES NOT set forth preconditions to becoming a disciple.

We learn that from the life of Jesus himself. For Christ to accomplish the work that he was being sent to do, it would involve his seeming defeat. He would not go to Jerusalem in triumph as his followers expected (the thinking of man), but rather he would suffer there and be killed (the thinking of God). Only in so doing, could all of God's people be saved from eternal death. After dying, Christ would rise to eternal life, and God would see to it that this sequence would not be changed.

Accordingly, those who belong to Jesus and follow him, can expect to follow a similar sequence and path. Experiences in each life, of course, will vary. The first obstacle, is not the world around us, but lies within the heart of every disciple. We all have a terrible tendency to sin and be disobedient to God. Mark 7:21 says it clearly: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly." This is not a pretty picture but it is a true picture. Right in the first Book of Genesis, after the fall, God said that the thoughts of man's heart were continually evil.

Thank God that Jesus has atoned for our sinfulness and that God has given us means for dealing with it, but the truth remains, we are stuck with our sinful hearts the rest of our lives on this earth. Jesus calls on us to deny ourselves and the natural way of the world. Thus he says, "For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The Apostle Paul says it in another way when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

Christ also says that those who follow him will "take up their cross". Again, applications of this in our life are many and varied. We probably will not die on a cross as he did, but as disciples we can expect there to be crosses in our lives as we come up against the trouble and evil of this world. The world would urge us to use whatever power we have to crush or get rid of our problem, maybe even to the point of cursing God for allowing us to have such a burden, but that is the thinking of man. God usually would have us endure the cross that we have, speak in Christ's name, and trust in God in that situation. That's the thinking of God. A true illustration may help us here. Hear this true story from Rev. Mike Walther.

Andy had the unfortunate fate of being born to a very immature and ignorant Father. His father continually mocked him for Andy's lack of athletic ability and for his difficulties in relating to girls. For a time Andy hated his father. He even had day dreams about killing him. But Andy was a Christian. His family attended church, although he thought his father was just a big hypocrite. But Andy talked with his pastor one day about how he felt, and his pastor read through some passages in the Gospel including the one we had today. Andy realized that his cross was his father. From that moment on, seeking God's help, he stopped hating him and prayed for him. Andy grew up to be an outstanding young man. He had a brother and a sister who experienced much pain inflicted by his father, but he was able to help them also.

Here is your challenge today. Look at the problems that you face, and it is OK to pray that they go away, but also pray as Jesus did, "Not my will, but yours be done." Be prepared that not all of them may go away. And for those that don't, looking to Jesus, bear your cross and follow him. He promises that a great good will eventually come of it, if not in this life, then in the next. Amen.

