

Title: “Are You Standing in God’s Way?”

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Matthew 16:24

9/3/2023

Service Readings: Jer. 15:15–21; Rom. 12:9–21; Matt. 16:21–28

What was behind Peter’s proclamation to Jesus? What he meant was not unique to his character but is representative of our own.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

²¹From 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. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” ²³But 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.”

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For 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? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

“Get behind me Jesus, for I know the life I want to live!” Can you imagine, for just a moment, uttering these words, even if only in your mind? What must have to be going on in that moment to even consider such a thought? It would have to be very bad, wouldn’t it? It would have to be a situation where Satan had a firm grasp on you, where he was even controlling your thoughts and actions. And we know he can’t do those things so this whole thing seems utterly... impossible, doesn’t it? I’m sure Peter thought the same thing! Now, these words didn’t exit his mouth, but they might have when he made his proclamation to Jesus! “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” This is what he said! To Jesus, no less. His message to his teacher is clear: “Jesus, you are mistaken in what you say will happen!” Is it no wonder, then that Jesus replied with such conviction, such passion, such power? “Get behind me *Satan!*” Get behind him, indeed!

Can you imagine, for just a moment, correcting Jesus in *any way*? Can you imagine, for just a moment, telling him that what he is planning is just simply.... Wrong? Of course not! That’s why we can look at Peter and just shake our heads with disapproval, because we would *never* do what he just did! Never! Right? Right?

OK, before we answer that, let's pause and reflect on what is actually going on in this passage. Let's slow down just a bit and explore this in a bit more detail. What did Peter say, and why did it provoke such a strong response from Jesus? What Peter was really articulating in his statement was a description of how we all live out our lives as Christians each and every day. "Far be it from me, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" That is what he said. But what Peter is *really articulating*, what Peter is meaning *behind* his statement might be summarized in two points.

The first is that Peter wants to protect Jesus from the world. Peter acknowledges who Jesus is; he is the Christ, the son of the living God. He says this much just before the scene that is played out before us in this passage. Jesus is God. And so in his mind Jesus is worth protecting from his enemies of this world. It makes logical sense.... until we think about it. Our God, the one who *created* these enemies, the one who *sustains* these enemies, needs *protecting* from these enemies? Really? That's absurd! But that is exactly what Peter is proffering. God simply cannot protect himself from his creation!

Let's pause there for just a second.... What comes to my mind at this time is this: I can't *believe* that Peter would even consider this! Seriously? God can't protect himself from his creation? Ah! Lest you think this is a problem unique to him, I propose that we think of our own lives. How often do we hide Jesus from our conversations with others? How often do we retreat and fail to boldly proclaim what he has done for us? Sure, it is easy to proclaim to others that Jesus loves them, that he died for their sins, and that in a sign of victory he rose from the dead. That's an awesome message and one that is easy to tell. But it gets exponentially difficult when the *implications* of that message come into contact with a person's way of living. When a person has to change his or her behavior, his or her lifestyle because of the message, it necessarily creates a strain on the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Is that why we sometimes water down or gloss over the message of Jesus when we talk to others? Not only do we as individuals do it, but even whole groups, whole congregations do it. I'm thinking of churches who proclaim a message contrary to the one Jesus taught. They water down his message of forgiveness into something that is more reflective of today's social norms than it is Jesus' norms. I can picture Jesus in those settings, positioned face to face with the pastor, and speaking the same words he spoke to Peter: "Get behind me Satan!"

The second thing that Peter is articulating behind his statement is related to the first point and it is this: we desire Jesus to conform to our way of thinking, even to approve our way of living. When Peter claimed that he would protect Jesus, he was not *just* stating that Jesus was wrong, that he would be protected from death, he was *also* stating that the plans Jesus *had were equally wrong*. According to Peter, he knew better than Jesus what those plans should be! Jesus had been teaching them about the necessity of his trip into Jerusalem, about his suffering and his crucifixion. He even told them that death would not be able to claim him but that he would rise again on the third day. He laid all his cards on the table – he told them everything! But those plans were not good enough for Peter, the disciple, let me remind you, who just previously confessed that Jesus was God!

Now, once again, lest you think this a character flaw unique to Peter, I'd invite us to contemplate where we fall into this sin in our own lives. How often do we try to stand in the way of God's plans? He invites us to offer our petitions, to tell him how we would *love* his plans to play out. Jesus even models this for us on the night of his arrest. There is nothing wrong with that! But where we tend to fall into sin is when the words "but your will be done" fall from our lips with insincerity – when we don't really mean it but instead mean "my will be done." How hard it is in those times, nearly impossible even to hand over our trust to Jesus, while at the same time confessing that he is Lord! It's easy to trust him with the small things, the inconsequential things, but when your loved one's health doesn't seem to be improving, how

much harder does it become to say “your will be done” and actually mean it? You see, we are not all that different from Peter, are we?

Peter wanted to stand in God’s way, divert him from his master plan, and ask him to adopt the one that he had hastily constructed. Jesus would be protected, kept from harm. Jesus would be safe. Jesus would be alive. Jesus would continue to lead his disciples. Wouldn’t that be much better? But thanks be to God that is not what happened. For without the cross where would we be? We’d be still dead in our sins, destined for an eternity separated from God.

So how, then are supposed to live? If we are to not protect Jesus from the world, and if we are not to try and make him conform to our way of thinking, what does our life look like? It looks like a disciple. And in this day, maybe it looks like a radical disciple. It looks like someone who firmly believes that he has traveled to the cross in Jesus and has died to sin. It looks like someone who firmly believes that he has not remained dead but has been raised in Jesus to new life. It looks like someone who so firmly believes in the miracle of baptism that every moment of every day he responds in worship, praise, and proclamation. Where he sets aside his own desires for the desires and plans of God. He knows that this may lead to suffering, humiliation, even death. He knows that this may keep him from wealth, power, influence. He knows that this means he will have to put others first, will have to die to self. And he knows that when he falls, when he fails, Jesus is there to pick him up and forgive him. But it is a life where he moves *out of the way* of Jesus and follows where he is led.

Get behind me Satan, and let me be led by my Lord and my God.

Please pray with me.

Lord so often do we set our minds on the things of this world. So often do we try to protect you. So often do we try to conform your plans to our own. Forgive us. Renew us. Strengthen us so that we can set our mind on the things of God, always.

Amen.