

The Cost of Building the Church

Matthew 16:21-26

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In building a house, the contractor must first make plans for the house and from the plans then evaluate what it is going to cost to complete it, so that he doesn't begin the project but have to abandon it because he didn't accurately count the cost. Jesus gave a parable to that effect in Luke 14:28-30. Likewise, before Christ began building His Church, in eternity the Son of God covenanted and planned with His Father in the Covenant of Redemption to save His elect, and then agreed upon the cost to build the Church. Before the first living stone was laid upon Christ the Rock, the righteousness of Christ was determined to be the Church's only merit and the sacrifice of Christ determined to remove all of the Church's demerit. This was the covenanted price to purchase the salvation of undeserving sinners who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Christ would build the Church by offering His own life as the all-sufficient payment to accomplish redemption.

And though Christ has once and for all paid the price and cost for the eternal salvation of all who will trust alone in Christ alone, it is a mistake to think that there is no cost to the Christian in following Christ. We pay nothing for our salvation, but we must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ even if means losing our dreams, losing our jobs, losing our freedom, losing our homes, losing our family, losing our friends, or even losing our lives. May the Holy Spirit search each of our hearts today and reveal to each of us what it is that we are not willing to sacrifice for Christ who sacrificed His life for us.

The main points from our text are these: (1) The Cost to Christ (Matthew 16:21); (2) The Foolishness of Peter (Matthew 16:22-23); and (3) The Cost

to Every Christian (Matthew 16:24-27).

I. **The Cost to Christ (Matthew 16:21).**

A. In the previous section of Matthew 16, the Lord revealed to His disciples whose is the Church—it is Christ’s Church (“I will build my church” Matthew 16:18). In the present section Christ will reveal the cost to build the Church—His sacrifice. The Lord issues what may seem to be a very strange command to His disciples in Matthew 16:20. The Lord had just heard from Peter, who speaks on behalf of the other disciples, that He, the Lord Jesus, is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:17), and then they are told by the Lord to keep it to themselves. Why?

1. First of all, this was a temporary command rather than a permanent command: Acts 2:36.

2. Although Peter’s testimony was true in what he testified concerning Christ, it was yet incomplete—it did not include the death and resurrection of Christ.

3. Christ would not send the apostles forth at this time until they could give a full and complete testimony to the truth of His death, bodily resurrection, and bodily ascension into heaven. They had been empowered with amazing gifts of miracles earlier in Christ’s ministry and by these miracles proclaimed the kingdom of God to Israel, but they were not ready to go forth and to preach Christ until they had grown in their knowledge of Christ’s work and were empowered to do so by Christ pouring forth His Spirit upon them from His royal throne in heaven.

a. The pastoral epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus, emphasize this theme of ministers being those who are learned and sound in doctrine lest they do more damage to the Church than good (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:3). There are no qualifications for a minister that focus on his style of preaching or rhetorical skills (2 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). This is simply an evidence of immaturity.

b. I was recently talking with a friend from another part of the world who was lamenting the fact that so many native pastors in rural villages were being ordained and yet had a rudimentary knowledge of sound doctrine. No doubt, it is pragmatically believed that such pastors are needed and will grow in their knowledge of sound doctrine, but that misses the very point—they are to be sound in doctrine so that they can exhort and convince those who contradict. It is the will of God that ministers first be sound in scriptural doctrine (as taught and summarized in faithful confessions [Westminster Confession of Faith] and catechisms [Shorter and Larger Catechisms]). Ministers and candidates for the ministry should not be allowed to take exception to these faithful and scriptural subordinate standards before a Presbytery (this is simply promoting error and division within the Church of Christ).

B. Knowing that His time is short, Christ begins to instruct His disciples concerning His death. This is the most direct reference to His death to date in Christ's ministry. There had previously been allusions to His death, but apparently the disciples had not understood their significance (e.g. Matthew 12:40).

1. It is amazing how slow the disciples were to learn all that was prophesied of Christ concerning His death from the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-26). They did not understand that the victorious Christ prophesied in Psalm 2 and the suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah 53 were fulfilled in the same person.

2. And as amazing as is the slowness of His disciples to grow in the knowledge of Christ, what is even more amazing is the patience of the Lord with His very slow disciples. As may be seen throughout the ministry of Christ, Jesus was not patient with the obstinate Pharisees, but He was amazingly patient with the weak disciples. This is the model that all who teach others must follow (whether in the home, at work, or in the Church).

3. I am so thankful for the Lord's patience to slow but sincere learners like the disciples (and like me). He taught them in degrees—not all at once. He could have given them the ability to receive the truth all at once. Why didn't He do so? I would suggest that the Lord desired to demonstrate through His disciples His love for poor, weak, vessels of mercy like you and me. For dear ones, His patience with our weaknesses is ultimately grounded upon the Covenant of Redemption with His Father and the Covenant of Grace with us. He will not lose one of us or leave even one of us behind (John 6:37-39).

C. At this point in Christ's ministry, He began clearly to teach the disciples that He was to suffer and die before He entered into His glory. The cost of purchasing His bride, the Church, unto Himself was to be His rejection by the Jewish Sanhedrin (consisting of the elders, chief priests, and scribes), His crucifixion, and His suffering the unfathomable wrath of God for the sins of His people.

1. On all accounts, there was nothing in the bride of Christ that deserved such a costly dowry; for she was an undeserving harlot, a thankless recipient of God's daily bread, and a spiteful enemy to Christ's holiness. And yet the sinless Christ suffered as no one has ever suffered, was rejected with such hatred as no one was ever rejected, and was crucified with such shame as no one was ever crucified.

2. Why such an infinitely valuable cost for such sinners? It was the cost of covenanted love. Is it any wonder that Christ will be patient, constant, steadfast, and ever faithful to us? He patiently continues every day to lead us out of our impurities and weaknesses and into His purity and strength until on that final day we are made a bride without even one impure blemish of any kind. Oh, what a glorious day that will be!

D. The Lord not only taught the disciples concerning His suffering,

rejection, and crucifixion, but also concerning His resurrection (“and be raised again the third day” Matthew 16:21).

1. How could we possibly be assured that the price which Jesus paid actually delivered us from the belching flames of hell which we deserved, and has freely given us all of the benefits of heaven as the inheritance of adopted children? Only a risen Savior, who overcame the power of death, could actually have accomplished redemption for His bride.

2. Dear ones, there is absolutely no good news if there is no bodily resurrection of Christ. For no resurrection means there is no redemption, there is no propitiation (or satisfaction for our sin). If Christ be not raised, Paul says our faith in Christ is vain, and we are yet dead in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). But the good news is that the tomb of Christ is empty. He is alive and has ascended into heaven, and we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.

3. This is the cost to Christ to build His Church—there may be no cost to us to be delivered from the eternal wrath of God and to be given the everlasting inheritance of the King, but it was incomprehensibly costly to our dear Savior.

II. The Foolishness of Peter (Matthew 16:22-23).

A. Before considering Peter’s foolishness, let us remember that the general view that prevailed among the people of Israel at that time was that the Messiah would be a political savior who would deliver them from all of their political enemies as he reigned from David’s throne in Jerusalem (John 6:15). This in part would explain Peter’s reaction to what Christ predicts. Peter earnestly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, and the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). But a crucified Messiah simply did not fit into Peter’s view at all.

B. Peter's reaction to Christ's prediction of His death was to take Christ aside and to rebuke Him for saying such things (Matthew 16:22). Here again we see the impetuous (rash, impulsive) nature of Peter. As I said earlier, this reaction was in part due to Peter's erroneous conception of Christ's kingdom, but also due in part to Peter's sincere but misguided love for the Lord. Peter's rebuke was not motivated from malice or hatred for Christ, but from a love and zeal for Christ that could not imagine His Lord being put to death. And yet a love and zeal without knowledge and truth is very dangerous as Christ here demonstrates.

1. How soon Peter has forgotten the significance of his confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Peter has the doctrine down, but the application of the doctrine is very weak at this point—Christ is God, yet Christ can be rebuked by man. Growth in the Christian life is not only growth in professing Christ, but growth in practically living out that profession. Dear ones, where there is no desire in our hearts to apply the truth we profess (but rather simply a desire to impress others or to use it to control others), there is no real evidence of a genuine work of grace (Titus 1:16). Such a thought ought to drive us to our knees to plead with the Lord to give us holy affections to apply whatever we learn in our lives.

2. Peter's sincere faith in Christ did not prevent him from making a very serious error. Peter was a sincere believer, but a sincerely wrong believer at this point. Sincerity, zeal, or even love are no excuse for unsound doctrine, worship, or church government. Many have been led astray by following such emotions rather than following the Word of the living God revealed in Scripture.

C. The Lord Jesus then turns to Peter and sternly rebukes him in the hearing of all the disciples, in fact Jesus issues the strongest rebuke a disciple of Christ might ever hear: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but

those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). Within a very short period of time, Peter went from the height of having been the one who confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), to the depth of being called Satan by Christ, the Son of the living God. Not that Christ said Peter was essentially Satan or was possessed by Satan, but rather that Peter was playing the role of Satan in forbidding to Christ the road of suffering and death as the path to glory. Calvin states that Peter “acted the part of Satan” and was rebuked by Christ for it. Why such a stern and severe rebuke to such a sincere and loving disciple? Let me suggest some reasons.

1. Peter was rebuking or censuring God Himself. He had forgotten himself. He had forgotten the Holy One he was rebuking. What audacity for any creature (whether believer or unbeliever) to rebuke God (Romans 9:20). We do the same when we rebuke God for His providential dealings with us by accusing Him of being unfair or unloving. In so doing we play the role of Satan. That’s what Satan does.

2. Peter was undermining (unintentionally) the Covenant of Grace. Christ’s sufferings were necessary to His glory and to the glory of His people. You’ll remember that Satan had sought to lead Christ away from fulfilling the Covenant of Grace by promising Him the kingdoms of the world by raw power, and that Christ had uttered the precise same words to Satan, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Luke 4:8); so likewise Peter here was ignorantly promoting a salvation by works, and therefore, received the same rebuke. He was in effect declaring that salvation may come by raw political force—that the kingdom may come without the cross.

- a. Dear ones, God has ordained that salvation and true reformation come not through the ballot box, not through the power of the military, nor through the wisdom of man, but by the foolishness of preaching a victory of grace through a crucified Savior and risen Lord. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts”

(Zechariah 4:6).

b. Let us never forget that reformation does not depend upon us being within the corrupt political system or within the backslidden ecclesiastical system and affecting change from within. Reformation comes from Christ and by depending upon the means of grace to affect true and lasting reformation (through the gospel transforming hearts, families, churches, and nations).

3. Peter was upholding the doctrine of man at the expense of the doctrine of Christ. Dear ones, whenever we oppose the truth of Christ, we need to hear these words loud and clear, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.” Our autonomy (self-rule by self-law) is satanic.

a. The word “Satan” means adversary and we become an adversary like Satan to Christ when we oppose (even unwittingly) the revealed will of Christ. How this should drive us to consider the importance of maintaining and promoting with all seriousness every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

b. The Lord rebuked Peter by saying in effect, “Your misguided love, sincerity, and zeal for Me are no substitute for the truth.” For love, sincerity, and zeal apart from the truth of Christ are always dangerous to the souls of men (just as is the opposite—the truth without love, sincerity, and zeal—dead orthodoxy). That is not to say that it is a better option to know the truth and yet not be zealous for the Cause of Christ, not to be sincere in faith, and not love and enjoy Christ. The Lord’s words simply imply the foundational nature of truth to all affections and actions in the Christian life. Peter was thinking man’s thoughts rather than thinking God’s thoughts.

III. The Cost to the Christian (Matthew 16:24-27).

A. The Lord now invites the larger crowd around Him to hear

these words along with His disciples (Mark 8:34). I want to make it clear that this is not a cost on the part of man in order to pay for his justification, adoption, sanctification, or glorification. This is not a salvation by merit or works. All the blessings of salvation (from beginning to end) are once and for all secured by Christ for His Redeemed Church.

B. There is, nevertheless, a cost to be paid by those who follow Christ. They must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ (Matthew 16:24-25; i.e. they must be willing to suffer for Christ, be rejected for Christ, and be crucified for Christ). In other words, those who would enjoy the glories of heaven will evidence it by their **willingness** to lose whatever is important to them in this earthly life for the sake of Christ and His gospel. After all, that which we consider to be most dear to us is that for which we are willing to sacrifice most. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21).

C. The questions asked here by Christ call us as Christians **to be willing** to sacrifice all we are and all we have for Him (Matthew 16:26). Everything must be weighed in light of eternity (Matthew 16:27). When such is done, the Christian cannot be on the losing end (Philippians 1:21). There will be no regrets for whatever the sacrifices we must make in this life to follow Christ.

Dear ones, because Jesus gave up all for us, is that a reason for us to give up little for Him? Is it not the very reason why we should be willing to give up all for Him? Beloved, we demonstrate that we are growing in our understanding of Christ's sacrificial death for us when we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for Christ and for one another.

Where we are always looking to win a debate by misrepresenting the positions of others, by putting others down in order that we might look

good before our peers, by being a taker in relationships rather than a giver, by continuing in unrepentant sin, we by our deeds declare that we have a very limited and small understanding of the sacrifice of Christ for us. But when we are willing to sacrifice our reputation in being ridiculed and scorned for holding to doctrines that are biblical, historical, and confessional and when we are willing to crucify self and deny ourselves and our so-called “rights” in order to serve others, there we will see the doctrine of Christ’s sacrifice living and bearing fruit in our lives to the glory of Christ. Many are looking to be great in the sight of men. God is calling us to be a living sacrifice in His sight that He may be seen as great in the sight of men. Amen.

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