

## **Introduction**

No doubt you have heard the saying, "finders keepers, losers weepers." It is actually quite old. The earliest known instance is traced to 200 B.C. in the work of a Roman playwright. The world uses this adage to say that if you find something, it is yours to keep. All the one can do who lost it is cry because they are not going to get it back. And while a person might assert this saying to defend keeping what they found, Jesus says it is not so. He says that the losers are really the keepers and the finders are the losers and therefore the weepers.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

Verse 21 points us to a chronological frame of reference. Matthew writes, "from that time." The time that he is talking about is the time when Peter boldly professed Jesus as the Christ and Jesus pronounced him blessed and indicated that this profession was the foundation upon which he would unstoppably build his church. Hades would be no match for the assault the church would bring upon its gates because the church would act in the authority of Jesus himself. Yet Jesus had charged the disciples strictly that they tell no one that he was the Christ. We find ourselves at that reference point this morning. Jesus is deepening the understanding of the church that he is building. A number of gripping truths emerge as he teaches.

First, we come face-to-face with . . .

### **I. An Astonishing Revelation.**

A. It is a curious thing that Jesus got the disciples all pumped up about Peter's confession that he is the Messiah only to charge them not to tell anybody that he was the Christ. He was emphatic. This was not the time to be spreading the word! We wonder why. One reason stands out as Jesus instructs the disciples more fully about crucial, though as yet unrealized, aspects of his work as Messiah.

B. 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. This information would indeed be astonishing to Jesus' disciples. The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would be a mighty warrior and deliverer, not one who would be subject to suffering and death. They envisioned one who would conquer, not one who would BE conquered, a winner not a loser. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, years and years later, he summarized the good news in two words: "Messiah crucified." And this, he said, was a stumbling block to the Jews. The writer of Hebrews was addressing Jews who had believed on Jesus but were wavering. And a major part of his effort was concentrated on showing that it was fitting, not unfitting, that Messiah be made perfect through suffering and that Messiah suffer death for the ones he is bringing to glory.

So it appears that since the disciples had come to see that Jesus is Messiah, they needed to swallow something that would be hard for them to take. Jesus will suffer many things. Jesus will be killed. Jesus will be raised on the third day. And this is what he was teaching them. They were not ready yet to proclaim Jesus as Messiah because they needed to be refined in their expectations of Messiah. He would not simply rise up and defeat all of Israel's enemies. No, the leaders of Israel themselves would make him suffer and kill him.

C. Jesus' method of instruction stands out to me. His method was to SHOW. Matthew specifies that Jesus began to SHOW these things to his disciples. He did not merely tell his disciples these things or speak to them about them. No, he went further. He showed them. He told the disciples and he spoke to the disciples, but neither of those words is used here. The word is to SHOW or to EXHIBIT, to present something clearly, to demonstrate it.

How would Jesus SHOW that he must suffer, die, and be raised, but by taking the disciples to the Scripture. He was always going to the Scripture. He would say, "It is written." For Jesus, the scripture is authoritative. It is the word of God. This is where he went to demonstrate that what he was saying was the truth. And this is precisely what the Apostles did as they were carrying out Jesus' commission. They referred to the Scripture.

Peter did it on the day of Pentecost. Regarding the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he argued that it was not possible for him to be held by death because of the statement in Psalm 16:10 that God would not abandon his soul to death or let his Holy One see corruption. In Acts 3:18 Peter says that God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. The same kind of thing happens in Acts 13:32. And in Acts 17, the setting switches to the Apostle Paul in Thessalonica, but the approach was the same. Paul entered the synagogue for three straight weeks and reasoned with them FROM THE SCRIPTURES explaining and proving that it was NECESSARY for the Messiah to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and that Jesus is this very Messiah. Again when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he reminded them of the gospel he had preached. And he declared, "For I delivered to you as of first importance . . . that Christ died for our sins ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES.

So you see if you want to show someone the truth, the place to go is to the scripture. It is what Jesus did. Think about it. Jesus is God the Son and everything he said is true. At times he spoke purely on his own authority. But Jesus also at times referred his hearers to the scriptures in order to demonstrate it to be true. From time to time I hear folks applaud red-letter editions of the Bible—you know—where the words of Jesus appear in red type. They seem to express that those words bear a special weight over and above the rest of scripture, but such thinking can lead to serious error. The fact is that the Bible as a whole is the word of God. All scripture is breathed out by God. And all scripture is profitable for doctrine. It all comes from God whether it flowed through Jesus' voice box or not. And remember that even the words ascribed to Jesus themselves were not written by Jesus but by mere men yet men who were moved along by the Spirit of God. To remember this fact will help guard against pitting scripture against scripture but reinforce all of scripture as one whole—each part a portion of the whole to be interpreted as the unity it is.

Moreover, the emphasis of this one word SHOW instructs us that when we point to the Bible as our authority, we do just what Jesus did. It is more than me or you simply saying something, sharing an opinion, a cleverly devised philosophy, or an old wives' tale. When we share the gospel, we

base our demonstration on the same authority as Jesus himself. The Apostle Peter made this very same point. In 2 Peter, he defends the gospel he preached this way: "we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty [when he was transfigured with glory and we heard with our own ears the voice of the Father, saying,] 'this is my beloved son with whom I am well-pleased.' . . . and we have THE PROPHETIC WORD more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

Jesus pointed to the scriptures as authoritative. It is what Peter and Paul did. And it is what the writer to the Hebrews did. He went to the scripture to show what is true.

Listen, you and I do not have the experience of seeing Jesus transfigured. We do not have the experience of eating the fish and bread he shared among thousands. But we have something even more certain. We have the word of God. The Old Testament is the same word Jesus read and to which he referred. And the New Testament is the very word he told his disciples the Holy Spirit would teach them and bring to their remembrance.

This book, the Bible, has stood the test of storm after storm. And long after every one of its enemies has died and faded away, it will still stand.

People do well to pay attention to it as a lamp shining in the darkness. Its central message is of the Holy God, revolted against by his own creatures, but who nevertheless determined to reconcile many of those rebels to himself by sending a deliverer, the Messiah, Jesus. And Jesus was beginning to show his disciples the core of that delivering work. He would suffer. He would be killed, and on the third day be raised. This was for the disciples an astonishing revelation. It was right there in the scriptures, but they and everyone else had missed it. And they were STILL missing it.

We observe that in . . .

## **II. A Resounding Repudiation.**

Peter reveals how strongly his misconception of the work of Messiah gripped his mind. It was completely inconceivable to him (and everybody else) that Messiah would die. He was so sure of it that he behaved demonstratively and disrespectfully to the very one he had just proclaimed to be the Messiah.

Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. But there was more. He entered into a tirade of repudiation seeking to chide Jesus for his misunderstanding.

He continued, "Far be it from you, Lord!" The thought that you should suffer and die is far from the realm of realistic thinking, Jesus. This shall never happen to you! Here is, I think, at least in part an expression of well-meaning loyalty. But principally Peter manifests arrogance and false assurance.

Peter's example shows us that a person can be completely convinced and yet completely wrong. He was fully convinced inwardly and adamantly expressive outwardly but it did not make his assertion true. His emotional demonstration could not change the fact that he was terribly mistaken. It reminds me of how people often react to the Bible when they come across something they do not like. For example, most people by nature make assumptions about human free will and divine fairness. They have this idea that everybody gets an equal shot and the difference between people in their acceptance with God or rejection by God lies ultimately within each individual himself. When they encounter the Bible teaching of God's sovereign grace, that it is God who does the saving and that one's salvation is all of grace, they often react strongly. I have witnessed people vehemently repudiate the doctrines of grace in the same manner as Peter rebuked Jesus. But no manner of emotionally charged rejection will undo the truth.

Peter's reaction here is a lesson on the need for humility as we seek to understand the truth. The Jews at Berea were a noble group. When Paul came to their town preaching Jesus as Messiah, they did not react the way many others did—stirring up strife and running people off and trying to kill whoever offended them in their determined unbelief. No, the Bereans

received the word with eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if the things were so, and many therefore believed.

People are always emotionally rejecting things in the Bible they do not like. But their rejection will never change the truth. When you open the Bible, do not go to it to have your ingrained beliefs confirmed. You might as well stay away. Rather draw near to be taught. Open it to be informed and even transformed.

We turn from Peter to Jesus and see . . .

### **III. A Stinging Castigation.**

I cannot think of a more stinging word of chastisement than for Jesus to call a person Satan. Clearly Peter has hit a nerve with Jesus. It is a very sensitive matter here. Get behind me, Satan. Jesus is telling Peter to get out of his way, to cease with his ideas that Messiah would somehow be able to accomplish his work of deliverance without suffering and without death. The suggestion is downright satanic. Jesus sees what Peter is saying as a stumbling block. These are arguments that cut to the heart, that soar to the apex of what is most difficult about Jesus' willingness to come from heaven to earth as Messiah. Nobody wants to suffer. Nobody wants to be killed. Nobody wants to endure hostilities. Nobody likes insults. Nobody likes humiliation. Jesus did not relish the suffering associated with God's plan for Messiah's work. And it was at this very point that Satan had tempted him in the wilderness.

Satan told Jesus to cast himself down from the temple because the angels would protect him. The heart of the suggestion seems to imply that the Jews would readily accept as Messiah one who dropped down in front of the Temple without injury. This was perhaps the kind of sign that would convince them, and he would be welcomed by the Jews instead of being despised and rejected by them. Satan then showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promised them to him if he would only fall down and worship him. That would be a whole lot easier than to endure suffering and death. In like manner to Satan's temptation, what Peter was suggesting to Jesus was an alternate path to his exaltation as Messiah. Peter was ready to go with Jesus down another kind of path. This was an opportune time for Satan. He turned up at the kind of moment when any one of us would

be ripe for sin. Take heed when you stand lest you fall. Thankfully Jesus resisted.

He also explained what was wrong here. Peter was setting his mind not on the things of God but on the things of man. He was looking at the situation from a sinful human standpoint. From that viewpoint suffering and dying are reprehensible. Self-preservation is the instinct that pulses through human veins. Love yourself. Please yourself. Protect yourself. But Jesus says to Peter, "No, that is man's way not God's way!" God's way of redemption was set forth in the scriptures. The servant of the Lord was to be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He was to have our iniquity placed on him. He was to be oppressed and afflicted—a lamb led to the slaughter. It was the will of the Lord to crush him so that out of the anguish of his soul he would make many to be accounted righteous. There was never any other way for the lamb to become the lion than to suffer and to be slain. Jesus went to the cross. He denied himself for his sheep. He suffered many things. He was killed. But Peter seemed to overlook the hope that Jesus held out. He would be raised from the dead. He met the ultimate foe, and he won. He succumbed to suffering and death, but they did not defeat him; he rose victorious! And he is mighty to save. All who believe in him, in this Messiah, in Jesus the Christ, will share in that victory!

But there is a price to be paid.

Lastly, we encounter . . .

#### **IV. A Sobering Application.**

If the disciples were not setting their minds on the things of God but on the things of man in regard to Messiah, then they were no doubt also thinking in this way in regard to themselves. If in their minds the Messiah would surely not have to suffer and die, then certainly neither would the followers of Messiah. And okay, even if he did maybe they would not have to.

So Jesus moves from instructing about his own self-denial and suffering and death to explain that the same applies to any and all who would follow him. 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."

The devil is a liar and a tempter and a deceiver. As with Jesus he tempts us by the offer of a short-cut to the goal of fulfillment. The hearts of human beings are exceedingly deceitful and desperately wicked. So they are enamored with the things of man. They are captivated by ease and pleasure and worldly success, with applause and the world's approval. They are naturally susceptible to believe the devil's lies. They are enticed by the idea of an easy way, a pleasurable way, a way of self-indulgence, a way that promises health and wealth and easy comfort.

So Satan reaches through the cloak of religion. He reaches through the name of Jesus to promote a false Christ. But it is one people are more naturally inclined to believe in. He does not demand much but promises the things your flesh longs for. False-Christ, anti-Christ abound today. They are okay with immorality. They will help you through your problems, make you successful, treat you like a heart-sick lover; they won't hold your immorality against you, and they certainly won't send anyone to hell.

None of these is the true Jesus, the true Christ. The true Christ requires that you set your mind on the things of God and walk the same path he walked. He was despised, rejected, afflicted, and killed. He denied his own prerogatives as the God who created the universe. If you follow the real Jesus, you will walk this path. It is a path which is characterized fundamentally by self-denial as opposed to self-indulgence. It says no to fleshly lusts. It says no to using people to get what you want. It says yes to serving people, to living in their interests instead of your own. It says yes to suffering and even death for the sake of following Christ. This means seeing your life not as your own but as his. It means saying, "Whatever things were gain to me, I count as loss for the sake of Christ because he is all I want and all I need." It means turning from self-seeking, from unkindness, from pride, from judgmentalism, from impatience, from immorality, from dishonesty, from worldliness, from indifference and bitterness and unforgiveness. All this Jesus expresses in terms of taking up your cross and losing your life for his sake.

And the real Jesus, the Christ, points beyond the path you walk. If you live in the spirit of the world—seeking to save your life, seeking your best life now, living in the interest of yourself—you will in fact lose your life eternally.



On the other hand, the one who denies himself or herself and loses their life to follow Christ will in fact find it.

A day of judgment looms. An accounting will be made. The true Jesus points through Satan's fog to warn against deception. The Son of Man is going to come and will repay each person according to what he has done. Lose your life now for him and gain your soul then or find your life now and lose your soul then. It really is that simple and clear. Do not be deceived.

## **Conclusion**

So really, it is not the losers who are the weepers. And it is not the finders who are the keepers. The losers are the keepers and the finders are the weepers. And as Jim Elliott famously said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." No fool at all. Only the fool would seek to find what he can only keep by losing.

Are you a finder or a keeper? A loser or a weeper?  
Lose to gain. Don't keep only to lose.