

Jesus Revealed as the Suffering One, Part 2

Matthew 16:24-28

Halifax: 26 February 2006

Introduction:

This week, I want to continue the message from last week...

- In Matthew 16:21 we saw how Jesus began to show His disciples that He was going to have to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the leaders of the Jews,
 - He even showed them that He must die!
- This must have astounded them!
 - They had just confessed Him to the Messiah, the Son of the living God...
 - They were following Him because they believed He was the One who had come to save Israel...
 - And now they find out that He is going suffer and die at Jerusalem!
 - They thought He was going to sit on a throne at Jerusalem,
 - but His throne was to be a cross!
- Peter tries to rebuke Him,
 - but Jesus sharply rebukes Peter, calling him Satan and telling him that he is completely out of touch with what God is doing...
 - Jesus is going to go and suffer and die, and that is final.
 - There is absolutely no room for debate.
- You can imagine what the disciples must have been thinking:
 - "Here we are, following this One we believe to be the Messiah...
 - and He tells us that He is going to Jerusalem to die!
 - What have we gotten ourselves into?
 - This is not quite what we had in mind when we left everything to follow Him!
 - We are not sure if we want to follow Him if He is going to die!"

And then Jesus turns to them all and tells them straight out...

- If any of you want to be my disciple, then will have to commit yourself to a life of suffering!
 - In fact, He says that *anyone* who wants to come after Him will have to suffer...
 - His words are:

- “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”
- This is what every follower of Christ must do.
 - This is what you must do if you desire to be His true disciple.
 - There are no other options.

I. Learn from this that suffering goes hand in hand with being a disciple of Christ.

A. Now I want you to think about why this is so.

1. Let me ask you a question:

- Why does God call us to come to Christ in the first place?
 - He calls us to come to Christ to be saved from our sin, right?
 - Of course He does!
 - The whole Bible is full of the great exhortation to look to Christ to be saved!

a. But just what is included when we speak of being “saved from sin?”

- If we come rightly to God, it involves two things...
 - 1) First, we must come to be saved from the misery of our sin...
 - In short, we don’t want to go to Hell,
 - so we come to Christ to be pardoned or forgiven.
 - He gave Himself as an offering for sin, and God accepted His offering, so we come looking to His offering for our forgiveness.
 - We understand that without forgiveness, we must suffer the wrath and curse of God forever.
 - And so we come looking to Christ to be delivered from the misery to which we are appointed.

TRANS> But the misery of sin must not be the only thing that we come to be saved from...

- It is a very important thing, but it is not the only thing...

2) Secondly, we come to be saved from a life of sin...

- We realise that we need a new heart and a new life.
 - We realise that we were made in the image of God to reflect God’s wisdom and love and truth and beauty.
 - but that we have been ruined by the fall...

- that we are corrupted and twisted and ugly.
- Not only our actions, but even our hearts are grossly defiled by sin.

TRANS> So we come not only to be forgiven, but also to be changed from a life of sin to a life of holiness.

b. God, in His gracious covenant promises these two things:

- In Hebrews 10:16-17, He says:
 - “This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,”
 - That speaks of saving us from our defilement and corruption—giving us a new heart and life by the power of the Spirit...
 - *then He adds*, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”
 - This speaks of the turning away of His wrath and curse—
 - the forgiveness of sin so that we are no longer under the misery of His curse.

TRANS> You will say to me,

- “Okay, that’s fine, but you were going to tell us why a life of suffering goes hand in hand with following Christ.”
 - Don’t worry, I haven’t forgotten about that...
 - It’s just that you have to be clear about the two things we come to Christ to be saved from when we come to be saved from sin if you are to understand why suffering is involved.

2. Now I want you to think especially about our being delivered from a life of sin—from our sinful heart and ways...

a. Think about what a radical thing that is!

- You were all conceived in sin...
 - By nature, you have a heart that is turned in rebellion against God...
 - By nature, you have a heart that is selfish and unloving...
 - Your desires are wrong, your affections are wrong, your whole life is wrong...

b. When you are effectually called by the gospel, God shows you all that...

- His Spirit causes you to repent—
 - to turn against what you are—

- to turn in disgust against your sinful and corrupt ways.
 - This is what we call the new birth...
 - It is God's Spirit giving you that new heart to live a new life!
 - It is a radical change because you turn against all that you are by nature to serve God.
- c. And so you come to Christ with this new heart, and you say,
- "Save me from what I am!"
- 1) And I tell you that when you do,
- You are asking Him to do violence to you!
 - You are asking Him to tear out all those deep roots of sin and wickedness...
 - You are asking Him to scrub you with steel wool...
 - You are asking Him to put you into the refiner's fire to be purified—
 - to burn away all the dross that you might be holy!
 - You are submitting to a life of suffering!
- 2) Truly it is a violent thing to be rooted up out of this sinful world and planted in Christ's Kingdom.
- It is a painful thing and something you have to submit to when you follow Christ.
 - It was especially violent for Christ who had to pay the penalty of your sin...
 - He had to bear all the pains of Hell for you...
 - But for as long as you in this world,
 - you have to bear the pain of being torn away from the sin that is so much a part of you.
- B. And so my friends, Christ shows you two painful things you must do if you want to be His disciples.
1. First, He says that you must deny yourself.
- a. In the very simplest terms, denying yourself means to say "no" to self.
- If a man desires to marry a woman and he goes to her and she denies him, she says "no..."
 - She does not give him what he wants.

- That's what you must do to your flesh...
- Our flesh is always crying out for things that are contrary to God's will, and Jesus is telling us that if we want to come after Him,
 - we have to deny ourselves...
 - We have to say "no" to self.

TRANS> Consider three things we have to say "no" to ourselves about...

- b. First, you have to say "no" to your own wisdom and begin to renew your mind according to God's word.
 - 1) You are not sanctified all at once when you come to Christ, but many of your thoughts are not God's thoughts...
 - You have to be renewed in your mind.
 - But you cannot be renewed unless you deny your own wisdom.
 - 2) Let me give you an example...
 - Let's say that you have children.
 - Chances are you have all sorts of notions about what it means to be a good parent.
 - Perhaps you are strongly opposed to spanking...
 - Or maybe you have swallowed the wisdom of this age that tantrums in two year olds and teen-age rebellion are a natural part of growing up, and that you will stifle and ruin your children if you try to suppress it.
 - Well, when you become Christ's disciple,
 - You have to forsake your own wisdom that you are so proud of and so attached to and listen to His word...
 - That is just one example!
 - You must deny your own wisdom about everything that pertains to life and godliness and renew your mind by the scriptures.
 - Your own wisdom is the first thing you have to say "no" to.
- c. Secondly, you have to say "no" to your own sinful desires!
 - 1) You may have a very strong desire for sexual immorality—
 - Perhaps you are like Ammon who was continually vexed by his half sister and could get no rest unless he had her.

- Perhaps you figure its okay to indulge in a bit of fantasy as long as you don't commit the act...
 - But it is not... You are not your own master!
 - Jesus is your master and He forbids you to look on a woman other than your lawful wife with lust.
 - You must deny your desires!

- 2) Perhaps you have strong desire to be successful in your career,
 - but to be successful, you have shade the truth.
 - You must deny yourself that desire.
 - Christ is your master and what you want doesn't matter—it's what He wants.

- 3) Some of you children...
 - Suppose you are in the kitchen and you have a strong desire for a piece of cake, but your mother says no.
 - If you want to follow Jesus,
 - you must say no to yourself about the cake because Christ commands you to honour your mother!
 - That means no whining,
 - no sneaking a piece when she's not looking,
 - You must deny yourself and obey Christ!

- 4) And then there are those desires we all have for glory and recognition!
 - Some people get upset because they came to church and didn't feel that people gave them enough attention!
 - In fact, they get upset almost wherever they go unless they get the attention and honour they want!
 - If you are focused on judging your neighbour like that...
 - always looking to see how your neighbour has treated you,
 - you need to deny yourself!
 - Jesus calls you to serve, not to be served.

TRANS> And so you see that denying yourself means that you must deny your own wisdom as well as your own desires...

- but that is not all!

d. You must also deny your own merit.

- You cannot faithfully follow Christ as long as you think you deserve anything from God.
 - You will always be whining and complaining about the way you are being treated until you come to deny that you deserve anything from God.
- Israel did not grasp this in the wilderness...
 - But Paul grasped it and that is why he considered himself a debtor to all men!
 - God had given him so much,
 - and he knew that the only way he could properly show his gratitude was by pouring himself out for his neighbour.
 - If you are disciple of Christ,
 - God has given you just as much as he gave Paul...
 - The question is, do you act as if you deserve to have even more?
 - You must deny your own merit and begin to respond to God with gratitude.

TRANS> Well, as you can see, I could go on and one talking about self-denial...

- But I won't—
 - I hope you get the point.
 - I hope that you will thoroughly examine yourself to see where you have not denied yourself.
 - But let's look now at the second thing that Christ says we must do if we are going to come after Him...

2. Jesus says you must take up your cross.

- a. This is, of course, related to self denial, but it is not exactly the same thing.
 - The pain of self-denial comes from the reluctance of your sinful flesh to give up dominion to Christ...
 - The pain of cross bearing comes from the world's reluctance to let any of her own serve Christ.
 - Friends, neighbours, family relations, and even governments don't like it one bit when one of their own is wholly devoted to Christ,
 - and they will let you know it!
- b. They have many ways of expressing their disapproval!

- 1) Sometimes by speaking ill of you to others—
 - “Joe’s gotten all messed up with religion—I think it might be a cult.”
 - “Sally is so self-righteous ever since she became a Christian—she won’t even laugh at our jokes anymore.”

- 2) Sometimes, the world expresses its disapproval by calling you evil to your face—
 - Consider the insults that are heaped upon any politician in our society that is suspected of letting his Christian faith influence his decisions!
 - The world tries ever so hard to make Christians feel guilty and as if they need to apologise for their faith.
 - I always think of a friend of mine who was marvellous converted from a life of drunkenness...
 - His friends got together and came to him to tell him that he had really taken a wrong turn and was destroying his whole life!

- 3) Sometimes, the world expresses its disapproval by excluding you...
 - Christians can lose their jobs or be denied promotions because they refuse to lie or because they will not work on the Sabbath.

- 4) Sometimes, the world expresses its disapproval by punishing you, and often even by killing you!
 - Believers are cut off from inheritances,
 - fined for saying their prayers,
 - imprisoned for preaching God’s word.
 - How many have been tortured and killed in the history of the church merely for professing Christ’s name and turning from idolatry!

TRANS> There are a thousand ways that Christians are afflicted for following Christ.

- c. But taking up the cross is not merely being afflicted.
 - It involves continuing to do God’s will even when it is presently bringing affliction or when you know that it will bring persecution!
 - There is often a temptation for the persecuted politician to be silent about his faith...
 - or for the zealous believer to compromise a little so as not to offend his family.

- Sometimes just a few small changes in one or two areas are enough to avoid the cross!
 - That makes the temptation to avoid the cross all the more dangerous!
 - “It is only a little matter!”
 - You will often be tested in very little things, both by God and by the world.
 - If you give way, the world is perfectly satisfied and leaves you alone.
 - But our Lord is not satisfied and will chasten you if you belong to Him.
- Jesus would have had it much easier if He had simply gone along with a few of the Pharisee’s traditions...
 - And Paul if he had only required the Gentiles to be circumcised instead of making such a big deal about it...
 - Many of the Scottish Presbyterians were killed only because they refused to confess that the King was the head of church.
 - A simple confession would have ended their misery,
 - but they chose to take up their cross!
- Matthew Henry points out that you must take up your cross whenever it is put in the way of obedience and faithfulness to Christ...
 - You must take it up and carry it rather than stumble over it so that you fall from God’s way.
 - How about you?
 - Is there a cross that you are refusing to bear?

TRANS> If you are going to follow Christ, it means being torn out of a sinful way of life from a sinful world.

- The separation is very painful!
 - Neither your flesh nor the world will let you go easily and they will both oppose you!
 - You will be tempted to compromise...
 - Jesus knows that-
 - He obviously had to take up His cross, and He also had to deny Himself—
 - not that He had sinful desires,

- but He had divine rights and glory that He had to lay aside in order to come to this world.
- And as He became fully man,
 - He also suffered the deprivations that are the result of the cross...
 - He knows we need encouragement to submit to a life of suffering...
 - And so in verses 25-28, Jesus gives you three arguments...

II. He gives you three arguments showing you why you ought to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him into a life of suffering here and now.

A. First, Jesus tells you that if you lose your life for Him, you will find your life!

1. The truth is, you need to find your life because you lost it in the fall...

- When Adam sinned against God, both he and all his descendents immediately died.
 - We ceased to be what God had created us to be.
 - We became like a car that won't do what the driver tells it to do...
 - When you push the gas, it may stop; when you turn on the blinker, it may speed up, when you steer, the hood pops open.
 - Such a car is worse than useless because it not only fails to sever its master, but it goes off and does its own thing.
 - So it is that we who were made to live beautifully as God's image,
 - reflecting the glory of His wisdom, beauty, and truth...
 - instead depict God as foolish, ugly, and false!
 - We are still the image of God, but we tell lies about Him continually.
- And so the scriptures teach that you are already dead because living for self, you have ceased to be what God created you to be!
 - And even the life that you have will be brought to an end unless you turn to Christ.
 - God will not allow you to continue, but will bring you to eternal punishment unless you are saved from this present death and find life.

2. And Jesus is telling you here in v. 25 that you will find your life if you come after Him,

- He says,
 - "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it!"

- You will find life—life as it is meant to be—life as the image of God—true human life restored...
 - If you will leave the life of sin you now have and follow Jesus!
- To pass from this present life to that new life in Christ, you must die to what you are now.
 - You must, as we have seen, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus.
 - You must come to Jesus to be delivered from that old self life and brought into eternal life!

3. Just think about what Jesus is saying here!

- No matter what you do, you are going to lose your life in this world...
 - You either lose it **now** by coming to Christ, denying yourself and taking up your cross...
 - or you will lose it on the day of judgement and end up in a far worse place with a far worse misery than any misery you know now.
 - If you try to hang on to your fleshly life, you are going to lose it anyway...
 - but if you give it up to follow Jesus, you will find real life in Him!
 - Surely, coming to Christ for life is the only reasonable choice.
 - You will have to be torn away from sinful life anyway, so why not to exchange sinful life for the holy and blessing life that Christ offers?

TRANS> Ah, someone says,

- But I will have to give up so much if I follow Christ.
 - God disapproves of many things that I cherish...
 - And if I were to truly and seriously follow Christ, my family and my friends will laugh at me and call me a fool...
 - There is too much to give up...

B. But see how Jesus gives you a second argument in verse 26 to show you that what you have now is not worth holding on to,

- even if you could have all the world!
- He reasons...
 - For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

1. What is it about your sinful life that is so dear to you that you won't forsake it?
 - a. Even if you could have every single thing you want in the whole world,
 - What good would it really be?
 - What good would be if in the end you are going to lose your own soul?
 - b. Let me ask you something...
 - If you have build a house on the sand that is going to fall down as soon as the first wind storm comes along,
 - does it really make much difference if it is very fine house or a shack?
 - Will you console yourself when it comes crashing down by saying,
 - "Well at least it was a big house"?
 - Of course not!
 - No matter how much you may have in this present world and no matter how precious it may be to you...
 - the day is coming when it will be utterly worthless.
 - Why would you cherish what is not yours to keep?
2. Now just think about this...
 - a. Let me try to put it in another way that I hope will drive home the point.
 - What if you were told that next week,
 - you could have whatever you wanted!
 - All the riches, gold, position, honours, popularity—everything this world has to offer!
 - But at the end of the week, all this would be taken from you,
 - and you would not simply return to normal,
 - but would be brought to a miserable condition of poverty, sickness, and rejection from now on...
 - Would you go for it?
 - Would you take that one week of glory for a whole life of misery?
 - Of course not!
 - b. The comparison Jesus makes is a much greater one than that!
 - He is comparing all that this world has to eternity

- Is all the riches and honours and pleasures of this world worth holding onto if it means that your own soul will be lost forever?
 - The question does not even need to be answered.
 - Let the words of our Lord expose your folly!
- C. In verse 27, He gives yet another argument to persuade you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him...
1. He tells you that He is going to come in full glory with angel attendants to reward every man according to his deeds!
 - a. This refers to His coming at the end of the age.
 - Jesus is coming with glory to judge both the living and the dead.
 - He makes it clear throughout the Bible that His disciples will not be disappointed or ashamed in that day that they have followed Him...
 - They will not regret one sacrifice they have made or one cross they have borne!
 - b. As He says in another place,
 - Mark 10:29-30: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.”
 2. Jesus’ rewards will not be small!
 - a. He is very generous with His rewards.
 - Even a cup of cold water given in His name will not lose its reward!
 - His reward is not a repayment, dollar for dollar,
 - but it is a reward of grace that He gives to encourage us in our service...
 - b. You are not saved on the basis of your works...
 - You are saved on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ...
 - But when you come to Him for salvation,
 - There will always be good works!
 - There will be good works because Jesus will begin to work in you...
 - He will submit you to His refiner’s fire and will tear you away from your sin and from the grip of this world.

- You come to Him for this purpose when you come to be saved...
 - You come to leave your ways and the world's ways and He leads you out of them by His power and grace...
 - And then He graciously rewards you...
 - He makes the changes in all who come to Him...
 - and then He rewards those changes!

TRANS> The choice is yours...

- You either deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him now,
 - ending up with a great reward...
 - Or you keep on in your sinful way, hanging on to you self life and avoiding the cross—
 - and end up losing your own soul.
 - These are the only two ways you can go.
 - You either “come after Him” or you continue in your own way.

D. Jesus wraps everything up by reminding us where He is going to end up...

1. Jesus had already told His disciples that He was going to suffer and die and then be raised up on the third day...
 - But as is so often the case,
 - They focused only on the suffering and death and ignored the resurrection.
 - And so here, at the end of his discourse,
 - Jesus reminds them that though He is going to the cross first,
 - It will lead to glory.
 - He says,
 - v. 28: Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.
2. The twelve disciples were all going to see Him go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...
 - but even before some of them died, they would see Christ coming in His kingdom!
 - a. Coming in His kingdom!

- That is, they would see on earth what Daniel saw in a prophetic vision.
 - In Daniel 7:13-14, he sees Christ coming in His kingdom...
 - He says:
 - Dan 7:13-14: I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.
 - That is the Son of man coming in His kingdom!
- b. Jesus is telling his disciples that this most momentous event was going to happen within the life time of some of them!
- 1) They would see from earth what Daniel saw from heaven.
 - a) That is, they would see how the Father would accept Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, raising Him from the dead!
 - b) And then they would see Jesus disappear into those clouds that Daniel saw from the other side when He ascended to take His place at the right hand of the Father and was given that everlasting dominion...
 - c) And they would see His Spirit poured out on the church with power to make them His witnesses to the ends of the earth...
 - d) And many of them would see that gospel begin to take root and some of them would see it spread into the world...
 - 2) In other words,
 - they would see in their very lifetime the Son of Man who now stood before them coming in His kingdom!
 - Yes, He would suffer greatly and be dishonoured first...
 - but it would only be a short while and they would see Him coming in His kingdom!

TRANS> What an encouragement this ought to have been to His disciples to follow Him!

- Yes, Jesus was calling them deny themselves and take up their cross...
 - They were to follow Him into a life of suffering...
 - But that life of suffering would lead them to eternal glory!
3. My friends, this is an even greater encouragement for you to follow this Saviour...

- a. If you follow Him to self denial the cross, you will also follow Him to glory later!
 - You are called to go where He has gone!
 - Not that you must break the curse and the power of death—
 - He has already done that for you...
 - Only He could do that...
 - But the only way to enter into the new life that He had purchased for you is to be done with the old life...
 - You must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.

- b. When Jesus spoke to His disciples on this occasion,
 - they did not yet have the encouragement of seeing the outcome of their Lord's suffering for the sake of His kingdom...
 - But you **do** have that encouragement!
 - And what an encouragement it is!
 - We can say with assurance,
 - If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him.
 - We have seen how the Father has highly exalted Him and given Him authority over all.
 - So what are you holding on to?
 - What is keeping you from coming after Jesus?
 - from denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Him?