

May 20, 2018

“Following Jesus”
Matthew 16:21-28

FCF: Needing to come back to the basics

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
(magnet) We must let Him define His role and our response.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It was July of 1961 and the Green Bay Packers football team was gathered for the first day of training camp. The previous season had ended with a heartbreaking defeat when the Packers squandered a lead late in the 4th quarter and lost the championship to the Philadelphia Eagles. The players had been thinking about this for the entire off-season. Finally, training camp had arrived and it was time to get to work. Their coach, however, had a different idea.

In his book, When Pride Still Mattered: A Life Of Vince Lombardi, David Maraniss describes what happened when Coach Lombardi arrived at training camp (**READ quote**):

He took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before... He began with the most elemental statement of all. “Gentlemen,” he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, “this is a football.”

Many are saying that, given the state of our culture, the church needs to get back to basics. That is, we don’t need radically new strategies so much as a return to our roots. That’s a point worth taking. Our text is helpful in that - taking us to the basics, to the very essentials.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Matthew 16:13-28**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

I know I’m a day late to mention etiquette rules for a Royal Wedding, but I didn’t think too many of you had an invitation. So here are a few things worth noting. First, you can’t sit anywhere you want. Second, the bride’s bouquet will not be caught but left on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Third, if you’re a woman, wear a hat. Fourth, follow the queen’s lead. Fifth, if you meet her, don’t make a fool of yourself. And sixth, again ladies, please don’t wear white.

The point being that you may not care for such rules. But it is a royal wedding. And you’re just a guest. So it’s important for you to know and abide by the protocols. Mind your manners. Know your place. Do what’s right. Let the royal family define what’s appropriate.

Last week, we read of Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of the living God. It was a clear declaration of who Jesus is. In the sequel to that, we learn yet more - not just who Jesus is but why He came and what it means to follow Him. That is, His role and our response. Jesus is the ultimate royal figure, the king who holds all kingdoms and all creation in His hand. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We must let Him define His role and our response.

I. HIS ROLE

So, let’s start with this - His role, His messiahship (**READ Matthew 16:21-23**).

A) A Prediction

1. His suffering

This is the first of four predictions Jesus makes of His death. He is heading to Jerusalem. There He will be put on trial by the Sanhedrin, put to death by the Romans, and raised three days later.

2. The certainty

And this is more than a probability. It is a certainty. “He must go”. He must and He will. This is the plan of God - orchestrated by the Father, accomplished by the Son, applied by the Spirit.

B) A Rebuke

But Peter has no ears for this. And so he pulls Jesus aside and gives Him a talking to.

1. Peter’s words

This defies all tradition. Disciples were not even to criticize their teacher. But this defies logic as well. Moments before, Peter had proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God.

2. Peter’s reasons

So who then is in the driver’s seat here? What’s going on? How Jesus defined His messiahship was simply impossible in Peter’s mind. The Messiah was to be a military and political Savior, come to drive the Romans out and take control. So this can’t be the plan. It was impossible.

Illustration:

Peter’s problem is that he hears the words “death”, “suffering”, or “cross” and tunes out. He can’t hear anything else. It’s like the call you get and the person on the other end says, “Listen, you need to know everyone is okay.” And somehow your brain switches the other way.

C) Jesus’ Resolve

Moving from Peter’s rebuke, we then come to Jesus’ resolve. And a rebuke of His own.

1. Words to Peter

(**READ Matthew 16:23**) Jesus had said the apostolic testimony would be the rock, the foundation stone upon which He would build His church. But in this - this idea of coming into His kingship without suffering - this was a hindrance, a stumbling stone. This harkens back to something we saw last week and the mistaken notion of Peter himself as the rock and foundation of the church.

2. Words to Satan

And Jesus recognizes the source of Peter’s words - Satan himself. The strategy is just as it had been in the wilderness temptation. Jesus will have none of it. And in all this, we see His resolve.

Jesus is absolutely emphatic about His role, about true messiahship.

Application:

All that said, we need to own our resistance to His role, to true messiahship. We fight against it. Think of what we lose in that. The cross shows us the lengths to which Jesus had to go to rescue us. Which tells us, of course, the depths to which we had sunk. Such is what we needed that it required that of Him. Our sin is that bad. But - hear this - His love is that good.

That’s the message of the cross - our sin is that bad but His love is that good. And that’s what we lose when we resist His messiahship. We lose our ability to be honest before Him and

each other, to repent and confess our sin, to extend the grace and forgiveness we have tasted - it's all on the line here. We need both this eternal criticism and assurance. We need both.

Jesus is Christ, Son of the living God. We must let Him define His role and messiahship.

II. OUR RESPONSE

And we must let Him define our response and discipleship (READ Matthew 16:24-28).

A) *The Cost*

Clearly, there is a cost here. Jesus is not pulling any punches at all on this.

1. The principle

The principle is self-denial, a disowning and renouncing. We are to abandon our striving for comfort and ease, name and approval, power and influence, security and control. That must die.

2. The image

And the image Jesus uses would have been familiar - carrying the cross. That is, the horizontal beam of the cross, borne by the victim to the site of their death, through the scorn of the crowd.

3. The pattern

That's the principle and the image. Then we have the pattern. Jesus' life and suffering is to be the pattern for our own. His trail blazes ours, one we set out upon and must continually walk.

Illustration:

If we're hearing Him, this should terrify us. His path is the pattern for our own. The pools will be open soon. So swimming lessons will be underway. Think of a small child, told to get in that water, knowing their feet can't touch. They need encouragement and emboldenment.

B) *The Reasons*

And Jesus provides something like that here - not just the high cost but great reasons.

1. Clarity of values

There is a clarity of values (READ Matthew 16:25-26). This is a paradox. The temporal things are passing, even our physical lives. But our souls endure. Would we trade one for the other?

2. Certainty of judgment

So we have this clarity of values. But also a certainty of judgment (READ Matthew 16:27). Things will not always be as they are. A day of reckoning is near. And Jesus will be the judge.

C) *The Reassurance*

And, lest we wonder if that clarity of values is actually true and the certainty of judgment is actually real, Jesus presses further and provides a reassurance (READ Matthew 16:28).

1. The possibilities

What is this? Some have said it's His transfiguration, the Resurrection, Pentecost, or His return.

2. Most likely

But likely, Jesus is not speaking of one event but the steady advance of His kingdom - especially a multiplication of disciples and a spread of the gospel to all nations. Which really happened.

The point being that Jesus is emphatic about His role and our response, about both His messiahship and our discipleship. For He wants His followers to be clear on these things.

Application:

Again though, we need to own our resistance. There are a host of reasons we chafe here. And they are worth considering. Generally, we are allergic to any call to suffering and sacrifice. Making things worse, we have a sense of entitlement. We think we're owed something. In the 21st century West, we assume life should be easy and convenient. As religious people, we assume God surely has to be indebted to us for our dutifulness and obedience. So to speak of any cost to discipleship can seem like nonsense. We have no categories for it. How could we?

Jesus is Christ, Son of the living God. We must let Him define His role and our response.

CONCLUSION:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who got this. He is known for his book, The Cost of Discipleship. ([READ quote](#)), "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*" But this was not just a theme of Bonhoeffer's writings. It marked his life. In the summer of 1939, he had come to the United States, thinking that was the best thing for him to do with the Nazis' rise to power in Germany. But he soon had his misgivings ([READ letter quote](#)):

I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.

Eventually, he became a spy, working with the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service. Many of his friends were shocked. He couldn't tell them. It's not that he didn't care what others thought. But Bonhoeffer was willing to die to his desire to be approved and admired by others.

In time, he became involved with an attempt to assassinate Hitler. An investigation was launched. Bonhoeffer was arrested. A guard gave him the chance to escape. But he declined for the sake of his family, knowing that they were already under suspicion. That was September 1944. Eventually, he was transferred to an extermination camp. And on April 9, 1945, one month before Germany surrendered, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged. He was a martyr.

Two things are worth noting. First, consider how incremental this was, how this cross-bearing looked different in different stages - leaving the States, denying reputation, sacrificing safety, giving it all. Second, how was he able to do this - to count the cost, to deny himself and take up the cross? And how can we? Again, it may not necessarily lead to martyrdom, but it will cost. There is a death. The only way we can die in such a way is in relationship with the living Jesus. Bonhoeffer was a brilliant man. But he knew that Jesus is not a principle. He is a person and He is the only one who can say what messiahship and discipleship mean. We follow Him.

"*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*" What will that mean for you? Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We must let Him define His role and our response.

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