

How to Save Your Life Matthew 16:21-28

This week people have been busy preparing for Hurricane Irene by boarding up their homes that are in low-lying areas, stocking up on emergency supplies, evacuating if instructed to do so by the national, state and city authorities. Each person is concerned with saving their lives and property. In our scripture today Jesus tells his disciples about how to have storm insurance...how to save their lives.

But in order to understand this scripture we have to go back to last week's sermon. It was about Peter making the great confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Peter was blessed by Jesus and told that this confession was the basis on which the church was built. We, like Peter, become living stones in the Body of Christ, the Church. Although the disciples had grasped the fact that Jesus was God's Messiah, they still had not grasped what that great fact meant. To them it meant something totally different from what it meant to Jesus. They were still thinking in terms of a conquering Messiah, a warrior king, who would sweep the Romans from Palestine and lead Israel to power. That is why Jesus commanded them to silence. If they had gone out to the people and preached their own ideas, all they would have succeeded in doing would have been to raise a tragic rebellion; they could have produced only another outbreak of violence doomed to disaster. Before they could preach that Jesus was the Messiah, they had to learn what that meant.

Our scripture takes place immediately after that encounter. Jesus had stated who he is, now he states His work; because the person and the work went together. He would go to Jerusalem, suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. This was His first clear statement of His death, though He had hinted at this before (Matt.

12:39–40; 16:4; John 2:19; 3:14; 6:51). “And He was stating the matter plainly” (Mark 8:32, NASB).

Peter’s response to this shocking statement certainly represented the feelings of the rest of the disciples: “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” Jesus turned His back on Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” Peter the “stone,” the “rock,” who had just been blessed (Matt. 16:18) became Peter the stumbling block who was not a blessing to Jesus!

Let’s look at the reason for the sudden change in Jesus’ response to Peter. First, Peter was thinking and responding like a human. Most humans want to escape suffering and death. Peter did not have God’s mind in this matter. Peter was not listening to Jesus’ words or the Word of God. Peter had enough faith to confess that Jesus is the Son of God, but he did not have the faith to believe that it was right for Jesus to suffer and die. Of course, Satan agreed with Peter’s words, for he used the same approach to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:8–10).

Peter could not understand how Jesus could be Messiah and yet die at the hands of the religious leaders. Peter probably was so shocked to hear Jesus speak of His death that he failed to hear Him mention His resurrection. Peter calls himself rebuking Jesus, but he was the one the get rebuked by Jesus. Peter was playing the role of Satan, who was being used as an instrument to tell Jesus there was another way to power and glory rather than doing things God’s way. Jesus had previously told Satan to get away from Him (4:10); He now repeated that order. Peter was trying to keep the Lord from dying, but that was a primary reason why Jesus came into the world. Peter was not thinking from God’s viewpoint.

Peter and the other disciples had an idea of what it meant that their teacher and mentor was the Messiah and it did not include suffering and dying, therefore they wanted Jesus to follow their plan. However Jesus explained that his plan, the path to discipleship involves a cost. Discipleship does not mean one enjoys glory

immediately. A person who will follow Jesus must deny themselves and all their ambitions. The person must take up their cross and follow Jesus (cf. 10:38). Today the cross is an accepted symbol of love and sacrifice. But in that day the cross was a horrible means of capital punishment. The Romans would not mention the cross in polite society. In fact, no Roman citizen could be crucified; this terrible death was reserved for their enemies. In the Roman Empire the convicted criminal, when taken to be crucified, was forced to carry his own cross. This showed publicly that he was then under and submissive to the rule he had been opposing. Likewise Jesus' disciples must demonstrate their submission to the One against whom they had rebelled. The path Jesus and His followers would travel would be a road of sorrow and suffering. But in losing one's life, one would truly find a better life. Jesus is explaining to the disciples that they are misunderstanding his program and the cost of discipleship.

Jesus presented to the disciples and to us two approaches to life: Jesus' way or the world's way.

Jesus says you can deny yourself. The world says live for yourself.

Jesus says you can take up your cross. The world says ignore the cross.

Jesus says you can follow Me. The world says follow the world.

Jesus says you can lose your life for His sake. The world says save your life for your own sake.

Jesus says you can forsake the world. The world says you can gain the world.

Jesus says you can keep your soul. The world says you can lose your soul.

Jesus says you can share His reward and glory. The world says you can lose His reward and glory .

cf. *confer*, compare

If it were possible for an individual, in preserving their own life, to gain the whole world, but in the process lose their soul, of what value would there be in possessing the world? To deny self means to give yourself wholly to Jesus and share in His rejection, shame and death. True discipleship involves following Jesus and doing His will, wherever that path might lead.

But suffering for the sake of Christ always leads to glory. This is why Jesus ended this short sermon with a reference to His glorious kingdom (Matt. 16:28).^{1 2}

There are three things which we must be prepared to do, if we is to save our lives and live the Christian life.

First we must deny ourselves. To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. To deny oneself means once, finally and for all to dethrone self and to enthrone God. To deny oneself means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the ruling passion of life.

Second we must take up the cross. The Christian life is the life of sacrificial service. The Christian may have to abandon personal ambition to serve Christ; it may be that we will discover that the place where we can give the greatest service to Jesus Christ is somewhere where the reward will be small and the prestige non-existent. We will certainly have to sacrifice time and leisure and pleasure in order to serve God through the service of others.

To put it quite simply, the comfort staying home, entertainment, may have to be sacrificed for the duties of being an elder, a deacon, preparing a Sunday School lesson for the children, practicing for the choir, or the visit to the home of some sad or lonely person. We may have to sacrifice certain things we could afford to possess in order to give more away. The Christian life is the sacrificial life.

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 16:21

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:58

Third, we must follow Jesus. We must give Jesus our obedience. When we were young we used to play a game called "Follow the Leader." Everything the leader did, however difficult, and, in the case of the game, however ridiculous, we had to copy. The Christian life is a constant following of our leader, a constant obedience in thought and word and action to Jesus. The Christian walks in the footsteps of Christ, wherever he may lead.

Remember the person that plays it safe loses life. "The time may well come when you can save your life by abandoning your faith; but if you do, so far from saving life, in the real sense of the term you are losing life." The person who is faithful may die but dies to live; the one who abandons faith for safety may live, but lives to die.

In our country and generation it is not likely we will be asked to die for our faith, but we must not attempt to live our lives in the search for safety, security, ease and comfort. If so, we are losing all that makes life worth while. Life becomes a selfish thing, when it could be filled with service. Life becomes an earthbound thing when it could have reached the stars. Someone once wrote a bitter epitaph on a man: "He was born a man and died a grocer." Any trade or profession might be substituted for the word grocer. The man who plays for safety ceases to be a man, for man is made in the image of God.

If we will risk it all for Christ we find life. It is the simple lesson of history that it has always been the adventurous souls, bidding farewell to security and safety, who wrote their names on history and greatly helped the world. Unless there had been those prepared to take risks, many a medical cure would not exist. Unless there had been those prepared to take risks, many of the machines which make life easier would never have been invented. Unless there were mothers prepared to take risks, no child would ever be born. It is the person who is prepared "to bet their life that there is a God" who in the ends finds life.

Jesus has warned us, if you play it safe and gain the whole world, you make find that you do not have a life that is worth living.³ With money you can purchase a house, but not a home. You can purchase medical care, but not health. You can purchase things, but not happiness.

How do you have your life? Give your life to Jesus and do things his way. Love God! Serve your fellowman. The only possible gift to the Church is ourselves; and the only possible gift to Christ is our whole life. There is no substitute for it. Nothing less will do. Jesus will make it worth your while!

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 146