

30th August 2020

“A Defining Moment”

Read: Matthew 16:21-28

Have you ever had a moment of great triumph, only to have it followed up with a moment of great failure? At one moment you're on top of the clouds; the next moment you're down in the dumps. I certainly have!

We're going to see that this was the case for Peter in today's passage. We're going to see that Jesus had some harsh words for Peter because Peter and the other apostles didn't understand what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah. Jesus is going to teach us about what it means for Him to be Messiah, and what it means for us to follow Him as Messiah.

Let's pray and ask God to speak to us as we reflect on this passage.

1. Peter, the Confused

In the previous section of chapter 16:17-19 after a discussion about Jesus' identity, Simon Peter recognised Jesus and confessed Him to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The confession of Peter, earned Jesus' recognition as 'Rock.' In other words, the demonstration of faith earned him the name Peter, 'Rock', and the incident was a highpoint in the development of the mission of Jesus.

So, when Peter heard Jesus announce that he must first endure the cross, he figured that Jesus must have made a mistake. So, immediately Peter said to Jesus in private: *“Never, Lord! This will never happen to you.”*

Jesus turned and said to Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle/hinderance to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”*

Jesus thought that the disciples understood his mission rightly, so Jesus was confident to reveal about his passion, death, and resurrection.

Peter was confused between two beliefs:

- a) The first one is Peter's popular belief, including the other disciples and all Israelites, that Jesus the military messiah, would liberate them from the Roman rule. Peter imagined that Jesus, the Messiah was a King, who would fight against the Roman rule to liberate the Israelite and to establish the kingdom of Israel. Peter firmly believed it. This was the way he was taught from his birth. Peter never thought that Jesus, the Messiah, came to the world for the salvation of humanity and to establish the kingdom of love. Peter could not accept that Jesus, the Messiah would suffer, die and rise to give life for all.
- b) Peter strongly believed that Jesus would establish the kingdom of power and authority without any struggle and pain, because he was taken up by the miracles after miracles performed by Jesus the Messiah. Jesus openly broke the disciples' belief system by saying about his suffering, death and resurrection. This was a defining moment, it was a new start for the disciples to understand that this Messiah is not for Israel alone, but for the whole of humanity.

2. Jesus, the Focused

Jesus knew that he was sent by his Father to the world to suffer, to die and to rise from the sinful humanity, to reconcile humanity with His Father from the world of death, out of His own love (John 3:16).

Jesus sharply said to Peter that he was an obstacle, a hinderance for his mission. Why did Jesus say it? Well:

- Peter's thinking was human thinking. Jesus' thinking was Divine thinking.
- Peter thought that Jesus has come for him and his people. Jesus came for the whole humanity.
- Peter wanted liberation, which was temporary. Jesus came for salvation, in turn salvation gave eternal life for all, who believed in Jesus, the Messiah.
- Peter's mind was confused. Jesus was clear in his focus.
- Peter thought liberation could be achieved without struggle. It was an easy goal. It was an overnight winning for him. Jesus knew that salvation could be achieved with his passion, death, and resurrection.

It was not easy for Jesus. It was a long struggle for Jesus till death on the Cross. There was no turning back for Jesus. Jesus followed the instructions from His Father in silence and in solitude. Jesus was strengthened when he thought of the crown. Jesus knew that no cross, no crown.

Here, now we are confronted with a question: Do we come to Jesus to lead an easy going life, or do we come to Jesus to take on his cross?

Although the explicit title of "Saviour" occurs nowhere in Matthew, one of the central roles of Matthew's Messiah is that of Saviour. The angel instructed Joseph that the name Jesus indicated his saving role and further defined that saving work in the forgiveness of sins (1:21). Again, and again Jesus' healing ministry is linked with themes of salvation and the forgiveness of sins: "*Your faith has saved you*" (9:22). The promise to disciples who endure faithful to the end is that they "*will be saved*" (10:22; 24:13). So, when Jesus' identity as God' Messiah is linked so directly to his suffering and death, it is ironically and theologically significant, that Jesus' role as Saviour will become both the ultimate mockery, and confession at the cross: "*He saved others; he cannot save himself*" (27:42).

Now in today's passage Matthew centres this clear understanding of Jesus' role as Saviour within a much broader perspective of God's overall work of salvation and the call to obedient discipleship.

As ones who now obediently hear that call, Matthew's community and ours become part of that story, now clearly centred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

This raises another question: Is it possible to achieve the crown without the cross?

No. Never. Impossible!

I personally think that the crown comes with risks, sufferings, pains, struggles, difficulties, passions, dying to self, giving away what binds us to enjoy the reward of the crown.

To achieve something special, we need to do something special. Success is the end. Struggle is the way to that end. Pain is joyful when you gain what no one else could!

- Abraham did not become 'Father of Faith' in a moment.
- Joseph did not become the 'PM of Egypt' easily.
- David did not become the 'King of Israel' without running alone for his life.
- Mary did not give birth to Jesus without abuse.
- The apostles did not preach the Gospel without giving their lives.
- Christianity never reached the nations without persecutions.

In the past, there was none who achieved the crown without passion.

In the present, there is no one who achieves the crown without pain.

In the future, there will be no one who will achieve the crown without struggle.

We have difficulties for our survival during this lockdown. We struggle to breathe when we wear masks. We are scared to touch. We are scared to go out. We thought life is easy-going. We thought that we have answers for everything. We thought that we can cure all sicknesses and illnesses. People struggle to survive without a job.

Some run to another country to live because of political pressures and instability. Nothing comes on a golden plate. Life is threatened, we experience suffering, pain, difficulty when we want to achieve something special in our lives. Nothing is possible without pain!

It did not all go well with Jesus. He still had to endure the cross. It did not all go well with Mary. A sword of sorrow still pierced her soul. It did not all go well with the countless men and women saints who have gone before us. Why then should it all go well with you and me?

In the face of disappointment, bereavement, sickness, ingratitude and failure, our faith response should be, not to question "Why me?" but to recognise that these crosses are the necessary condition for our future glory.

3. We, the Followers

For the same reason, Jesus said to his disciples, *"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."* A beautiful word from Jesus. Jesus did not say to his disciples that you worship me, But Jesus said to them that you follow me. Worship is the end. Following is the life-style.

There was a person, who lost his mother. His father married for a second time. His step mother made his life miserable. He went to the Church. He stood in front of the cross. He spoke to the cross all that he was going through with tears in his eyes which kept rolling on his cheeks. He stood for some time. He realised that there was no response from the cross. He turned back walking towards the entrance struggling to contain his sorrow.

There was a voice. It said to him, *"My son, I understand you. I have gone through it before you. Some people were ready to stone me. Some people were ready to kill me. My own friend betrayed me. My close friend denied me not once but three times. My disciples ran away from me when I was arrested. I went through pain. I was nailed on the cross. I was pierced. One thief ridiculed me while I was on the cross struggling to breathe. I died on the cross in front of my own mother and beloved friend. I understand you. Come close to me and follow me. I was risen on the third day with all glory."*

The voice stopped. He decided to follow Christ Jesus. He is now a Bishop in one of the Dioceses in India. This story sums up why we need to follow Christ Jesus in our lives. We think that we struggle, we suffer, we have pains, we have difficulties. We think that always there is a cross in our lives. Jesus' words are miraculous. Jesus says, *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* The story that we have just read, illustrates the truth of what Jesus said.

We are in lockdown, we are in struggle, we are in pain, we are in difficulties, we live an uncomfortable life, we have no other way. Jesus was locked down for three days before the glory of the resurrection, as we are in the world at present.

We need to keep our hope, faith and love, so that we can say: *"What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?"*

We may have achievements, successes, positions and money but it does not give us peace of mind.

Could we save our lives from a tiny deadly virus even though we have scientific knowledge, and a whole lot of money? No.

Super power countries are on their knees. We can gain something special in life when we follow Christ Jesus in our lives. We need to follow Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, who underwent his passion, death, and resurrection, who understands us, and who is with us till the end of age.

v28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Oftentimes, when we think of Jesus “coming in his kingdom” we think of the return of Jesus to the earth to conquer evil and call His own to be with Him in the new heaven and new earth. However, that doesn’t appear to be what Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus says, some standing here will not taste death until Jesus comes in His kingdom. Well, Jesus has not yet returned by 2020 and all the original disciples have died, so that doesn’t appear to be what Jesus is talking about.

What could Jesus mean? Well, there are several different theories, one which I like is that Jesus is referring to His own resurrection and ascension back into heaven. At the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples will begin to understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is, they will begin to look forward to His return. This is a total transformation of the kingdom of Jesus.

Concluding Thoughts:

The disciples are starting to learn from Jesus more and more about what kind of Messiah He would be and more and more about what it means to be His disciple. We must learn these lessons as well. We must understand that the reality that Jesus was the Messiah meant that He would suffer and that those who follow Him must be willing to suffer as well.

The Bottom Line: The *death* of Jesus leads to *our death* to *sin*, which leads to *our death* to the *world*.

We are dead to sin and we must die to the world, its temptation, and its rewards. We must live for Christ, His blessings, and His rewards. Be moved and challenged by the words of Jesus, once again:

v24-27 “Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?

Don’t be in such a hurry to go into business for yourself. Before you know it the Son of Man will arrive with all the splendour of his Father, accompanied by an army of angels. You’ll get everything you have coming to you, a personal gift. (The Message)

Brothers & sisters by following Jesus we learn from him what the cross and the crown means in our lives. By following and learning from Jesus, we move from the confusion of Peter to the focus of Jesus, from the cross of our lives to the crown of our heavenly lives by the way we live our lives day to day.

If you’ve received new life in Jesus, live that new life in Jesus! Let the light of Jesus within you shine for the glory of God!