

Lesson 61 – TAKING UP CHRIST’S CROSS

Matthew 16:24-28

The words of our Lord to Peter in Matthew 16:23 most probably stung the apostle to the heart. To think that Peter was being used by Satan as a stumbling-block to the Savior’s great work in His death. Obviously, Peter did not appreciate the necessity of Christ’s sufferings and sacrifice. He and the other disciples should have been thrilled at hearing of the redemption that Christ would accomplish by His death and resurrection, but instead, they could not connect His being killed with the glory that would follow (John 12:23). Peter knew and believed in the Person of Christ, but he did not yet understand the work the Son of God came to accomplish – the salvation of His people by His death.

(Matt. 16:24) – The disciples, like many in Israel, still had the notion that Messiah would usher in a new and glorious earthly kingdom. They imagined He would lead a successful rebellion against Rome, set up His kingdom in Jerusalem, and they would rule on earth with Him. Instead of telling them they would be exalted to rule on earth, He said, *“IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.”* This is the Gospel command of humility and self-denial. Christ denied Himself as He was made “a little lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:7) and “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Php. 2:7-8). So, His followers must also, by the grace of God, humble themselves. May the Lord enable all of us to deny our own wisdom, righteousness, and ambitions and be content to receive all mercy and grace from Him.

(Matt. 16:25) – Those who set their minds, hearts, and energies seeking and building the things of this world will lose their lives forever. All who by God’s grace deny themselves and bow to the Lord, submitting to His way of salvation and His righteousness, will find eternal life with Him. This self-denial is not a condition we must meet in order to attain and/or maintain salvation. It is EVIDENCE that God has done a saving work within us by His Spirit and through His Word in and by Christ.

(Matt. 16:26) – These are questions that ought to pierce the hearts of everyone and yet few give more than a passing thought about matters of death, judgment, and eternity. In our day many refer back to some lame religious experience under a false gospel and claim salvation based on such experiences. For the most part, such people gain the world’s approval and praise. But *“WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED, IF HE SHALL GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD, AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL? OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?”* Consider the rich man in Luke 12:13-21. Here are

four facts we would all do well to consider seriously. (1) We live in a world where all things are temporal (2 Cor. 4:18). (2) We are heading toward a world where all things are eternal. (3) Only those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, those who are found in His righteousness imputed, and who are brought by God to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works will be eternally safe from God's wrath. (4) Estimate the worth of everything by their value in the day of death, judgment, and eternity.

(Matt. 16:27) – There is coming a day of reckoning when all people will receive from the Lord their just reward. The judgment will be “*ACCORDING TO [OUR] WORKS,*” but it is not based on our works, and it will not be to determine whether our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. The deeds of the unrighteous will all be exposed as bad because all that they did was for self and in unbelief. Nothing the unrighteous have ever done is done for the glory of God in Christ (Matt. 7:23; Rev. 20:12). The deeds of the righteous (sinners saved by grace and made righteous in Christ), however, will all be good for two reasons. (1) All our sins were washed away by the blood of Christ so they cannot be counted against us (Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 10:17; Jer. 50:20). (2) Their works done for the glory of God (Matt. 5:16), and, though in themselves are not meritorious or part of our righteousness before God, they are foreordained by God (Eph. 2:10) and the work of God in us (Php. 2:13). They are presented to God through Christ our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) and made accepted with God in Christ (Heb. 13:20-21). They are important as evidences of our standing with God in Christ, based on His righteousness imputed to us and the reality of our faith in Christ (James 2:20). They do not secure our place in glory nor do they lead us into the presence of God upon our death. They follow the children of God as a witness to our confidence in Christ (Rev. 14:13). For believers, this is not a judgment of our persons BY our works; it is a judgment OF our works as we stand before God in Christ, washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

(Matt. 16:28) – The Lord here refers to the establishment of His kingdom by His death on the cross leading to His resurrection from the dead and His ascension unto the Father, proving that the sceptre of righteousness, which He possessed as the King of righteousness, was effectual to the complete salvation of all of God's elect. It also refers to the fact of Christ sending forth the Holy Spirit to convince multitudes of their sinfulness and their need of God's grace in Christ, bringing them to faith and repentance. Also, at Pentecost, Christ manifested His coming in His kingdom in a powerful and miraculous way as thousands heard the Gospel and saw Him by faith (Acts 2:32-36). He poured out His Spirit upon preachers who proclaimed the Gospel in languages they had never studied or even heard (Acts 2:11). This was coming of His kingdom!