

Introduction

The broad context of our consideration of Matthew 16.21-28 today is the interplay between the spreading fame of Jesus, rising opposition to Him among the leadership in Israel, and His special final training of the disciples. On our side of the resurrection, we have lessons here from the training of the disciples (*mutatis mutandis*, with the necessary adjustments) to our training as disciples in light of our Savior's completed work. Ridderbos calls this kind of reading a reading of the text from the perspective of fulfillment (*Matthew* 309). This perspective has warrant in the text when Jesus addresses His disciples in the general language of "anyone," "whoever," and "a man" (vs. 21, 24a with 24b-26). Consequently, the subject of the passage is discipleship. To get our bearings, we need to survey the passage in light of this question, "what angle does Jesus give us here on discipleship?" What kind of discipleship is He talking about that has a focus on His work (21-23), a cost (24), and a benefit (25-27)? The angle on discipleship that unfolds in this outline is that of the mindset of a disciple. What we have here is the subject of God-minded discipleship. This will become evident as we see how verse 23 integrates with the passage as a whole. Hence, God-minded discipleship has a focus, a cost, and a benefit.

1A. God-minded discipleship has a focus

It focuses on the necessity of the suffering of Christ, suffering that leads to death and resurrection. This focus surfaces here in two ways: a) in our Lord's exposition of Scripture (to His disciples) and b) in His interaction with Peter.

1B. In our Lord's exposition of Scripture

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (16.21; cf. 9.15, the bridegroom shall be taken).

Without question, "showing" His disciples these things refers to His exposition of Scripture. Consider how Luke 24 makes this point clear.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God (Lk. 24.44-53).

Notice that what Jesus explains from the OT about the necessity of His suffering and resurrection is what He spoke to them while He was with them. He explains it as the fulfillment of prophecy is unfolding before their very eyes. The "must" of Scripture that Jesus cites clearly reveals His submission to the task before Him as Messiah, to learn obedience through suffering. There was no necessity that He save us but if He would save us, it is necessary that He suffer. That necessity He took upon Himself voluntarily because of His love for you and me.

Focus in discipleship is on the word of Christ pointing us to the word of Scripture regarding His suffering, death, and resurrection.

1) Suffering

The Christ, Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man that you correctly confess, Jesus says, must suffer. There is an amazing connection of seemingly contrary words in the flow of thought here: I am the Son of God and Son of Man, I am the Sabbath king and universal sovereign

promised to come, I will build my church the gates of death will not stand before it, *and I will suffer!*

2) Death

He directs our focus to a core in His suffering: *the nation's leaders will kill Him*. Son of Man and Son of God will die to build His church and take His church beyond the grave to heaven's glory.

3) Resurrection

However, *God will raise Him from the dead*. The victory over death for His church is due to His victory over death as the first fruits. Recall His teaching earlier in Matthew. Jesus told us that the experience of Jonah promised the resurrection from the jaws of death of the coming prophet, the seed of Abraham to be sacrificed, the seed of Eve that will bring restoration to the human family by crushing the head of the serpent. The OT has rivets throughout its pages that promise the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. We have a reminder here of the importance of all of Scripture for disciples in the life of the church Jesus builds.

2B. In our Lord's interaction with Peter

Again, Peter stands out from the crowd, and his actions lead to instructive words about the focus of discipleship.

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (16.22-23).

1) Peter's rebuke of Christ

Peter "took him aside," that is, he grabbed our Lord from behind. The idea is that he took hold of Jesus by the arm (or by His shoulders) to turn Him around physically as part of his goal of turning Him away from what He just predicted. Peter would turn the Lord away from His resolve to suffer and die, from His acceptance of this kind of mistreatment at Jerusalem. Later, Peter will say, "If you are going to die, I will die with you." Now, he cannot receive the teaching of the Lord Jesus! Peter correctly confesses the identity of Jesus as Messiah, but he and the apostles are not ready yet to be the foundation of the church by proclaiming this truth from the housetops (the seed of the gospel of Jesus has to grow for a time before it becomes the full plant of apostolic proclamation). In this light, we can understand the "secrecy" about the Lord's identity (v. 20, Peter and company are not ready yet for their foundation laying task).

This is an emotional response. It shows what Peter feels deeply. The idea of the suffering of Jesus repels him and he reacts. It cannot be. It is an intolerable thought. He is outspoken, representative, and blind, as a disciple in tension: he shows amazingly frank disrespectful protectiveness or loving rudeness, or ignorant love, or zeal without knowledge. Observing him, we have to feel a tension ourselves about him and about ourselves. We feel embarrassed with an embarrassment that we think he should feel; we are embarrassed for him. Then, we feel embarrassed about the ways that we in effect rebuke the Lord by opposing His will as to how He suffers to build a church of sinners in need of each other.

Peter says no to the idea of Christ suffering. He says no to the acceptance of Christ of it as something necessary. Remarkably, Peter says no to biblical necessity and saving necessity. He says no to God's will! He does this out of love for Christ but with little insight into the plan of God and the teaching of the OT on the suffering servant and His full work.

2) Christ's reply to Peter

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (16.23). Disciples focus on the things of God when they focus on the work of Christ and submit to its necessity. Jesus willingly submits to suffering to build a church of frail sinner-disciples. Thus, we should willingly submit to suffering as the

central focus of our relationships with one another. True God-mindedness will focus on His suffering and on our joint suffering with one another with Him.

This is how we set our minds on the things of God. These are the things of God: suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. That threefold subject is the core of the gospel, and the foundation on which we stand as His church. The mindset of disciples is to have their minds set on the work of Christ, on the Son of Man all glorious (Dan 7), and the suffering servant bitterly rejected (Isa 53). This is God-mindedness, seeking first the kingdom of God. Paul speaks in Colossians (cf. Col 3.1f) of this heavenly mindedness. God-minded focus in discipleship includes a willingness to suffer with Him, to die with Him, and to live in the newness of His resurrection life (Col 3.1; Rom 6.4).

2A. God-minded discipleship has a cost

The focus of God-mindedness leads naturally in thought to the cost of Christian discipleship. **Then Jesus told his disciples, "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (16.24).**

In this context (from 16.13 forward), coming after Him relates to the church made up of sinners. Accordingly, God-minded discipleship requires a mutuality of correction and forgiveness (Mat 18) that rests on self-denial (Mat 16). Ah! There is the rub. Those who follow Christ, take up this cross of self-sacrifice to follow Him. This is how we love one another as He loved us. This is God-minded discipleship in the church Jesus builds. This is following as disciples who seek obedience to Him in a wholehearted way. As our Lord said, "you must make the choice of love for God above all earthly things" to be my disciple-servant (Mat 6.24; 7.13-14). This is heavenly mindedness and the core of heart religion; it shows itself in good deeds in practical ways.

Are you God-minded or man-minded? Do you set your minds on the things of God or on the things of man? What do you treasure in life? Do you treasure the work of Christ in suffering, death, and resurrection that unfolds in the building of gatherings of sinners? He builds the church of people who are to take up the cross of suffering, self-denial, in a learning process that has practical obedient love as its primary goal. Do you cherish the church and the "ordinary" means of grace? Your answers reveal the genuineness of your relationship to Jesus-Messiah. For Jesus says, "If you would come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me in my church; follow me through suffering and self-sacrifice."

For perspective in the reformed tradition, I think it is fair to say (without fear of contradiction) that the driving center of Calvin's piety is a hearty emphasis on self-denial. Those of you who have read the excerpts from Calvin in *The Golden Booklet* will recall that for Calvin what makes discipleship golden is the real and down to earth practice of self-denial. That is the dynamic that led to Calvin's catechism, the *Institutes*, and (through them) to the central contribution that Calvin made in the Reformation. Calvin sought to promote God-minded discipleship by emphasizing what Jesus emphasized: "if you want to be my disciple, my follower, take up your cross to suffer in self-denial in a loving relationship to other sinners in a mutuality of learning in my church."

3A. God-minded discipleship has a benefit

In pointed summary, we can say that the benefit of God-minded discipleship is salvation, the saving of your life as something of great value against the Day of Judgment.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (16.25-27).

Verse 28 just sort of drops in here and hangs suspended in mid-air. We will come back to it next time, but for now, our attention is on the benefit of God-minded discipleship that Jesus gives for our ears in verses 25-27.

He gives promise coupled with warning here. If you are unwilling to deny yourself in a hearty discipleship in His church, then you are losing your life, but if you are willing to deny yourself in hearty discipleship in His church for His sake, then you are finding your life. If you are man-minded, putting all your attention and energy on yourself and your own life, if you are selfish, if you treasure the things of earth, if you think of yourself and not of others, then you lose, you lose everything; you lose your life in its fullest conceivable sense. Earth centeredness and self-centeredness may lead to gain in the things of this earth. However, what profit do you have if you gain the whole world but forfeit your life?

To drive the point home, Jesus asks the question of exchange. What can a person give in return for his life (v. 26b)? This idea of exchange points out the great value of life, of your life before God in the church of Jesus-Messiah. Think of it like this. What would you do if someone gave you a billion dollars? What if there was a condition, namely, that the moment the check lands in your hand, you forfeit your life, die, and your body begins to decay in the grave? Would the gain equal the cost? What price equals the value of your life? Can you assign a value? Assassins assign a value. Fools assign a value. However, what is the value for you?

What makes this question even stronger is the consequence for not only this world but for the world to come. What would it profit you if you gained the whole world but lost your life, your entire existence body and soul, before God in the Day of Judgment? **For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done** (16.27). Discipleship in the church of Christ carries with it the greatest promise of life. On the backside of the promise is the warning of eternal judgment for those who are selfish, man-minded, and earth-minded. Such people will not deny themselves and willingly submit to Christ and His church-family of sinners. However, for those who entrust themselves to Jesus-Messiah and who deny themselves, and take up the life of self-sacrificing love, He gives the marvelous benefit of finding life instead of forfeiting it.

Conclusions

1) If we have a healthy Christian life, then we will be concerned about our actions day by day in light of the repayment that is coming. If we are not thinking about how we live in light of the repayment that is coming, then we do not have a healthy Christian life.

2) In the light of the enemy that dogs our tracks, death, we should live the way Paul tells us to live in 2 Corinthians 5.6-10: **So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**

3) If we take up God-minded discipleship, we will get our minds right. We get our minds right by setting them on the right things in the right way. We do so because the stakes are high, value in life, safety in death, and mercy on the Day of Judgment. However, like the disciples, we can be very thick headed, but like them, we are on the way if we cling to Christ confessing Him as our risen Lord. We too must look back to the OT and the NT. We must look back through the eyes of Jesus and the apostles. We must pursue the process of word and sacrament administered by fallible and, as Calvin puts it, puny servants. We are in a process with much yet to learn. Pastors have to be patient with flocks. Flocks have to be patient with pastors. We must live out the principles of the love chapter (1 Co 13).

4) How do we do this being emotional and impulsive like Peter? We react to the unfolding plan of God. Christ is building His church in a radical way by suffering to gather undeserving sinners together as His family of brothers and sisters. When we oppose the will of God in Scripture regarding the work of Christ, regarding His suffering as He brings sinners together in one body, we do what Peter did: we rebuke the Lord. We say, "No, Lord, you cannot do it this way." We may be showing loving disrespect or unloving protectiveness (this is not worthy of Christ to get His feet sore and dirty this way). However, at bottom, we show our ignorance and our unwillingness to follow Him bearing our cross.

Again, how do we live out the love chapter? We begin by focusing on the work of Christ in His suffering, death, and resurrection, and by considering how He builds His church out of sinner-disciples in need of correction, self-discipline, and church discipline. There we cling to His suffering, death and resurrection and cling to Him as "my" prophet, priest, and king. We live our love by diligently taking up the means God appoints and by committing every baby step forward to Him, for without Him, we can do nothing. In a word, we must commit ourselves to love one another in our learning to show that we are His disciples. Then and only then do we love as Christ loved us: **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

May we fall down before the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ to honor Him in our thoughts; may our minds be set firmly on Him as prophet, priest and king; may we set our minds on the things of God to His glory forever, Amen.