

MATTHEW 16:20-23

THE NECESSITY OF JESUS' DEATH AND SUFFERING

Most of us are familiar with some sort of story, whether historical, fiction or a little bit of both, that tells of some king. The story may begin with a young man, a prince who must retake the throne and then go into a quest he undertakes in order that he regain the throne and then ends with a coronation ceremony where everyone kneels before him and his throne in the royal court. Some version of this story has been told for time immemorial. And that is generally where it ends unless there is some sequel.

This story was something with which the disciples were also familiar. From the time they were all at their mother's knee they had been told of the golden age of Israel, which was at its zenith under king David. They knew that in some form, the Messiah would come from the line of David and many believed that David would return in some form or fashion to reclaim the throne. To be truthful, the theology concerning this was pretty ambiguous. And it is in this morass of tradition and misunderstood theology that the disciples find themselves.

Last week saw that the disciples as a group, with Peter at the helm, understood that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed. This term had come to be firmly connected with the coming king. What we will see today is that even though the disciples now equated Jesus with the coming king, they still didn't understand how or when He would take His throne. And sadly, many in the church don't truly comprehend it either.

Mt. 16:20-22

20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Going back to verse 20, we see that Jesus prohibited His disciples from declaring the revelation they had gotten regarding that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Why is this? Peter answers the question for us.

Upon telling the disciples that He **MUST** go to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise from the dead, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him, saying that there is no way this could happen to Him.

- Peter rebuked Jesus. Same word used when Jesus rebuked the storm and demons. The strongest word possible.
- Peter was perhaps well meaning but didn't understand the mission or the plan.
- This is why Jesus would not allow them to declare who He truly was.
- If Peter, along with the others could move from so clearly "getting it" to now so clearly "not getting it" then what would happen when the crowds, who had not gotten such a revelation got wind of Jesus being the king?
- How can we move so quickly from being so close to God and His plan for us? How can we move so quickly from seeing how God has moved in our lives in a mighty way, to feeling that He has betrayed us or is no longer hearing us? The answer is in Jesus' response.

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

- No, Peter has not been suddenly possessed by the devil.
- The "rock" – Peter, has become a stumbling block. Peter actually "reminds" Jesus of what Satan did back in Mt. 4:10.

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

While Satan knew what he was doing, Peter unknowingly is doing the same thing. He is attempting to divert Jesus from what He has come to do. As long as Peter is standing in front of Jesus, he is in the way.

And when we attempt to stand in front of God's plan for our lives or even the whole world we are a hindrance also.

Peter is being selfish but he doesn't know it. He thinks he has a handle on the plan. After all, he has just been acknowledged as the guy who will kick things off as far as the church goes. But he still doesn't know exactly what that means. He's working without all the clues. And when Jesus attempts to explain it to him/ them, they can't sit still and hear because it runs so contrary to what they have always been taught concerning a king. The king can't die! He has to conquer! But the truth is that Jesus will conquer through death.

This seems so counter-intuitive. We may say we know Jesus had to die for us, but what does that mean at a deeper level?

Peter and the others don't understand and so they revert to "fleshly/ worldly reasoning." And that is our normal default response also.

So what is Jesus trying to say here? How have the disciples gotten it so wrong?

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

The word "must" here is a big one.

The word "must" indicates that Jesus was planning to die. And this is what incensed Peter. It is one thing to say that you are going to fight and may die, but it another things altogether to say that you MUST die; that you're planning to die. This is why Peter "rebuked" Jesus in the strongest manner possible.

- Typical Jewish response. How could the king/ Messiah die if He was to conquer? That was unthinkable.
- Jesus is saying that, "Yes, I am the king, but I'm not here to TAKE power, but to lose it. I'm not here to fight and live but to die. I'm not here to rule but to serve. And that's how I'm going to defeat evil and right all the wrongs of this world."
- He didn't say that He WOULD suffer, but that HE MUST suffer. He must suffer, must be rejected, must be killed and must be resurrected. The world could not be renewed unless He died.
- **But why must He die?**
- The personal necessity.

- We all know at least to some extent the difference between false and true love - fake and authentic love.

“In false love your aim is to use the other person to fulfill your happiness. You’re love is conditional: You give it only as long as the person is affirming you and meeting your needs. And it’s not invulnerable: You hold back so that you can cut your losses if necessary. But in true love, your aim is to spend yourself and use yourself for the happiness of the other, because your greatest joy is that person’s joy. Therefore your affection is unconditional: You give it regardless of whether your loved one is meeting your needs. And it’s radically vulnerable: You spend everything, hold nothing back.” William Vanstone

He then goes on to say that surprisingly no one is capable of giving true love. We want it desperately, but we can’t give it. He doesn’t say we can’t give any kind of real love at all, but he’s saying that nobody is fully capable of true love. And all of our love is somewhat fake. Because we need love just as we need air and water, there is a certain mercenary/ selfish quality to our relationships. We tend to look for love in people we feel can affirm us and fill that need. We invest our love only where we know we will get a good return. And when we do that, our love is conditional and non-vulnerable because we do not love the person not simply for himself or herself; we love the person partly for the love we’re getting. In the end we are all groping and searching for the love for which we’re starved and incapable of fully giving it.

So what or whom we need is someone who doesn’t really need us at all - someone who can love us without needing, though desiring our love in return. We weren’t created because God needed someone to love. In the Trinity, the Godhead has loved and been loved for eternity. We weren’t created because needed love but because He loved humanity.

The only one who can satisfy the true love we all desire is God. And when we are filled with that true love, then and only then can we begin to give it to others.

But there is more than the personal necessity of this love and the death of Jesus. There is also the legal necessity.

- Someone borrows your lawnmower and breaks it. You can make them pay or you can forgive them of the debt. But the debt doesn’t go away. Either they make restitution or you have to absorb the cost.
- But it goes beyond simple economics. When someone robs you of an

- opportunity or happiness, of reputation or something you can never get back, this creates a sense of being wronged, violated – debt. This person owes you. Once you have felt that debt, you have one of two options.
- You can make them pay by destroying their opportunities, ruin their reputation, hope they suffer, possibly actually seeing that they do. But this brings about another problem. As you pursue this line of action, you are becoming like them – harder and colder. You have become the perpetrator.
 - Your only other recourse is to forgive them. But this isn't easy. **There is nothing easy about real forgiveness. Why? Because when you forgive someone you are absorbing the debt. It is costing you. It is agonizing.**
 - **But only if you absorb the cost of the debt is there any chance of righting the wrong.**
 - If we realize that forgiveness always entails suffering on the part of the forgiver and that the only hope of rectifying and setting aright the wrongs comes by paying the cost of suffering, then it shouldn't surprise us when Jesus says that the only way He can forgive the sin of the human race is to suffer and die for it. Either we will have to pay the price for sin – or He will. And the truth is that we can't pay the price. Therefore, out of His love for us, He did it.
 - There is also a cosmic necessity.
 - Why couldn't Jesus have just jumped in front of a bus or waited for a natural death of old age or sickness?
 - **Hebrews 9:22**
And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

- This is not some hocus-pocus view of blood. Rather, in the Biblical context blood means a life given or taken before its natural end. Jesus' death was a payment AND a demonstration of His love.
- Death is what most of us fear most. But by submitting to death Jesus broke its hold on Him and more indirectly us.
- When someone is holding something over your head as leverage they have power over you. But if that leverage is meaningless, they no longer have control. The power is broken. This is why you can't stop someone who sees himself or herself as a martyr. Death has no leverage on them.
- The sting of death is conquered because at our death we go to be with

Jesus. This is preferable to being here on earth.

- When death loses its sting, when death no longer has any power over you, because of what Jesus did on the cross, then you will be living a life of love and not of fear.
- That is one aspect of the power of the Gospel!
- Jesus had to die for our own personal necessity – that of true love.
- He had to die out of a legal necessity – to satisfy a debt that we couldn't pay!
- And out of a cosmic necessity because that death had to be one of willing, self-sacrifice - out of love for us.
- Because of this, the Gospel, we can live a life from the knowledge of love and not the guilt of fear.
- Because He died, we can live! Really live!!
- Think about it. It's life changing!

QUESTIONS:

- How have we been a stumbling- block to God?
- How have we moved from a revelation of God's moving in our lives to being an obstacle for Him?
- What do we think of true love and how it differs from the way it is defined by the world?
- How have we withheld love?