

A Vision of Death for Life

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INI - SDG

Last week we heard Peter's confession "you are the Christ." We saw how through this confession Peter became one who was built on the rock that is Christ. We all also with Abraham, Job, David, Peter and many others become children of God through this same confession. Having become children of God through faith, Jesus now reveals to them and to us, God's vision of what it will mean to stand on Christ. We are called to follow Christ to the cross, and through the cross to the glory that will follow.

Matthew 16:21-28 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!" 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." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Jesus SHOWED them the way to the cross.

These words probably don't strike us as that odd because we are used to the word "show" being used metaphorically to mean explain or tell, but this is unusual in scripture. In fact, there are only two places where this word is used this way in the New Testament. Everywhere else it is used of something that is literally seen with the eyes. The ten lepers who were cleansed were supposed to show themselves to the priest. Jesus showed them his hands and his feet. Peter was shown in a vision that he should not call unclean what God has called clean.

The unusualness of the word draws attention to what Jesus is explaining here. He does more than just tell his disciples, he shows them.

In our school opening devotion earlier this week, I challenged the children to listen carefully to a set of instructions and then see if they could remember them well enough to find the hidden treasure. Yet, no matter how well they listened they probably wouldn't ever have been able to memorize all the steps having it heard them just once. If you knew the church property well enough and could envision the instructions as I gave them, if you could walk with me in your mind, you wouldn't need to remember all

the instructions. You could envision the approximate place and then go search that area, or at least get to the fifth step and then just remember the last couple instructions. IF anyone wants to try it the video is on youtube and facebook.

Jesus isn't just telling us the path to the cross. He wants to show it to us. He wants us to see the vision. The path of Jesus is the path of the cross. The path of following him is "sorrow, death, and then resurrection and glory."

IN 1 Corinthians 12:31 Paul writes, "**But earnestly desire the best¹ gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.**"

Just like Jesus in our text Paul wants to show the Corinthians the way of the cross, the way of Christ. He shows it to them with his own life as an example. They were using their gifts which were given to them by the Holy Spirit as a way of showing off their own importance. Paul wants them to replace the earthly vision of pride in their gifts, with the Christ like vision of humility, using their gifts to build up others.

Paul himself showed them what the way of the cross looked like in his life.

Both in Revelation and in Daniel, Jesus gave visions to his servants "to show" them the things that must take place. In both cases the majority of what is seen in these visions is not ease and wealth and glory. It is growing evil, persecution, trouble, and sorrow while we are on this earth. It is also the rock that was cut without hands, the establishing of God's church, and the crystal river and the forest of life before the throne of God.

Matthew 16:24 let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me

The way of the cross is suffering and humility now, glory after death. The way of the cross is death now then life.

Peter, despite having boldly confessed Christ, has a very different idea of what that path should look like. He has a very different vision of what life will be like following Christ. Perhaps he is thinking of the Feeding the 5,000, and all the bread and fish he could want to eat. Perhaps he is thinking of the walking on the water and looking forward to the glory of doing more miracles himself.

Whatever he is thinking of, it is clear that he is clinging to his own vision of what walking with Christ ought to look like, and not seeing the vision which Christ is giving.

Jesus calls Peter "Satan." He calls this attitude a stumbling block. That is a trap that leads to death.

We become like Peter mindful of the things of men and not of God, when we cling to our vision of what our life ought to be, instead of accepting Christ's.

Young men and women entering the preaching or teaching ministry, might begin with an earthly vision. Maybe they think they are going to be the greatest pastor ever and everyone will applaud their sermons. If they hold on to that vision, they are easily led to give sermons that are pleasing to men but not to God.

Teachers might begin with an idealized vision of what it will be like, if they hold on to that vision, they might easily become discouraged to the point of giving up.

We start Sunday school and bible class next Sunday and will install our new Sunday school teachers. Sunday school teachers entering that ministry with the false idea of a classroom full of well-behaved children, and parents always bringing the kids to Sunday school are going to be disappointed.

I'm a big believer in jumping into the deep end. If we knew all the difficulties that we were going to go through in marriage, in raising a family, in the teaching or preaching ministry, we probably wouldn't ever jump in. However, don't jump in with your eyes closed. Enter knowing it is not going to be easy.

Christ calls us to follow him, but to do so knowing there will be suffering. It is going to be difficult and there are going to be challenges, but God has promised to give you the strength that is needed to do his will, to walk his path.

There is no salvation without the cross. If Jesus had not gone to the cross we would not be saved. If we follow Christ, we follow him to the cross, but of course we also follow him through the cross into life.

Peter wasn't listening very carefully to Jesus. He was so focused on the suffering and death part that he missed the really important bit. "And rise again on the third day."

We are often fooled. The ways of this earth are so much more appealing. We often wander from the path Christ would have us walk.

Jesus was steadfast in his walk to the cross. Because he died, we are forgiven. He daily as our Good Shepherd Jesus picks us up off the wrong path and puts us back on the way that leads to him. He often uses crosses to bring us closer to him. He gives us this vision at the end, the vision of the feast of the Lamb.

The way of Christ means suffering and death, but death which leads to life. Our eternal life is based on his ability to walk the path of the cross, not ours. Jesus calls us to follow him on this path. Amen.