

## Matthew 16:21-23 The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh

Alright, today we start a new section in Matthew, Matthew 16:21-28.  
So far, we have studied:

Verses 1-4 in this chapter, The Proof from Heaven that the Pharisees demanded from Jesus.

Verses 5-12, The Perceptions of Religious Leaven.

Verses 13-20, The Public Opinion of Jesus. We spent quite some time in that section.

Then the last two:

Matthew 16:21-27, The Principles of Discipleship.

Probably the most in-depth, detailed, important Scriptures for a believer to know in all of the Bible. Everything hinges on this section, as far as understanding the rest of the Scriptures.

And then a one verse final, The Promise of His Coming in verse 28.

So, our first section is going to be The Principles of Discipleship, verses 21- 27. Reading at verse 21 - verses 21 to 23 for this morning - The Conflict in Discipleship. The Scripture tells us that, **From that time** (or from then) **Jesus began to show His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go away into Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and the third day to be raised.** So, this is a marker in the ministry of Jesus, where from this time on it is all going to be about going to Jerusalem to suffer, to die, and to be raised again.

And it is interesting, I point out to you a couple of things about the grammar of the text. "From then Jesus began to show His disciples that it is necessary for Him" - the King James uses the word *must*, it is the word *binding* that we studied last time about loosing and binding. So, when it is God's divine will it uses the word *binding*. Jesus is bound in going to Jerusalem. In fact, there are four infinitives. Infinitives start with the word *to*, to do something:

- (1) *to go away to Jerusalem*
- (2) *to suffer many things*
- (3) *to be killed*
- (4) *the third day to be raised.*

So, He told the disciples this, and for the first time He is introducing suffering. For the first time now, He's introducing suffering, that it is necessary. It is a must that Jesus goes to

Jerusalem to suffer many things, to be killed, and the third day to be raised. Needless to say, this is not what the disciples wanted to hear. And we might take note of several things as we go through this.

Our view and understanding of success, even as a Christian in this world is a lot different than how the Lord sees success in this world. The Lord sees His success, His mission as coming, suffering, being killed, and being raised. Whereas the disciples thought that they were going to go with Him into Jerusalem and just take over, win the victory. You can imagine that in the end when Jesus died on the cross, and they took Him down off the cross, all of their human hopes were down the drain. They thought that this would be a victorious, triumphant, entry and the Lord would set up His kingdom in Jerusalem. But this is not what their expectations were.

And so, now the Lord is introducing suffering; and verses 22 and 23 are two of the most powerful verses. You should know these two verses, you should know where they are, copy them down and read them every once in a while; as it just has a flood of New Testament Biblical truth, spiritual truth, in them.

**(22) And when Peter took Him,**

So, Peter took Jesus, after Jesus said this. And by the way, in the Greek text the term *took Him* means that he took Him aside privately, Peter did.

**And he began to rebuke Him,**

That is right, Peter began to rebuke Jesus.

**Saying to Him, - and the literal translation is - "Mercy to You, Lord;"**

which in our English, if it was smoothed out would be, "May God have mercy on you, Lord, for saying this."

**"This will never happen to you."** The term *never* is represented by two negatives in the Greek text to show that never, not just not: *this will not happen to You*, but *this will never happen to You*. Can you imagine Peter taking Jesus himself aside and telling Him what is going to be and what is not going to be?

Peter's response is a great learning lesson because he is responding out of the expression of his human sin nature, out of his flesh. Even to the point that he would rebuke Jesus. Peter's response to suffering begins what we call, The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh. This is the Man Centered Gospel. And Peter is preserving his flesh, preserving the Lord's flesh. "No, You are not going to go and have this happen to You. God have mercy on You for even thinking such a thing, this will never happen to You." What a statement to make.

I do not fault Peter at all because he is displaying for us what we all do in our expressions most of the time and even what is going on in the body of Christ today. We have churches that are built upon what they call the promises of God, which are built around The Gospel of the Preservation of the Flesh. That a God of love would never allow hardship, and suffering, sickness, illness. "God would never allow that," they say. So, it is the preservation of the flesh.

Keeping it completely healthy and completely wealthy and completely happy so the message goes.

After a person is saved, the flesh is against the things of the Lord. There is a duel going on in the believer's life between the Spirit of God and my human nature, or flesh, which lusts for its own way.

In Galatians 5:17, Paul says, **For the flesh lusts against God's Spirit and God's Spirit is against the flesh...** In the Greek text it is a statement of fact. The Spirit does not lust against the flesh, the Spirit is against the flesh, it opposes the flesh. It is the flesh that is lusting against God's Spirit, and where God's Spirit wants to go, and what God's Spirit wants to do.

**...and these are contrary to one another...**

The flesh and the Spirit in the believer's life are contrary; they are opposing each other.

**...so that you cannot do the things that you would.**

That last little phrase basically means God's Spirit is there to keep you from being taken away by the desires of your flesh. Without Him there, we would be gone. He is the one who prevents so that we cannot do the things that we would desire to do. So, there is a battle going on. When a person is saved, I'm sure that there is a peace and a comfort in knowing we are forgiven for our sins and that when we die were going to go to heaven; but at the same time, while we are still here and we have Christ living within, the flesh is now our enemy and the enemy of the Spirit of God.

In Romans 7:18, Paul says that in his flesh dwells no good thing. The flesh is not redeemed. When a person is saved, your flesh is not saved, your human nature is not saved. Your spirit, your soul, is saved, but not the flesh; it is not redeemed. It is still under the influence of sin.

Romans 8:7 also says that the flesh is hostile towards the things of God. Hostility, enmity. That is why people get so angry at the Word of God and even try to find a church or try to find a fellowship where there is no conviction.

Interesting had a note this week of someone who felt uncomfortable and convicted at studies and did not want to go back because of the conviction. So basically, there are people who are trying to find churches that are warm and fuzzy, feeling good, and where you are not convicted. Well, if you are not convicted that means the flesh is pretty satisfied, when in reality it is the enemy of God.

When Jesus died on the cross He put to death the flesh and the sin nature. And what that means is - and we will take this more next week - when He died on the cross, He died my death, and He put my sin nature to death on the cross. Death does not mean nonexistent. Death means separation. He was crucified and He crucified my human sin nature to where Paul can say in Galatians 2:20, **I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life that I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me,**

**and gave himself for me.** The Bible teaches that trials and hardships are part of the Christian life. It is normal.

Even to the point in Hebrews chapter 12, the writer of Hebrews says if you are not suffering through these trials then you have a false claim to be a Christian. Because the flesh was crucified on the cross, therefore the flesh must suffer.

In James 1:1-3, James says, **My brethren, count it all joy when you should fall into various temptations; Knowing this,** (so we should rejoice over our trials knowing this) **that the trying of your faith works endurance.** As you go through the trials of life, it is *remaining under*. That is what the word *endurance* means in James 1:2; it means *to remain under*. We are learning how to remain under and trust the Lord and not have to get out of our situations. Remaining under with Him, two things happen:

- (1) We get to experience all of Him. He is the one who sustains us.
- (2) Others get to see Christ in us, sustaining us.

James 1:3 says, **knowing this, that the trying of your faith works endurance.** It works that patience out. He goes on to say in the rest of the chapter that if you bailout, I am using summary statements from the Greek word *bail-eh-oh*. If you bail out from underneath your circumstances God just brings more. Because He is teaching us to remain under; He is teaching us to trust Him.

Peter wrote in I Peter 4:12-13, Peter says, **Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trials which are to test you, as though some strange thing has happened to you.** (it is not strange) **But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings.** We are not only partakers of His resurrected life, the victorious life, but we are also partakers of His suffering. **That, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding great joy.** So, trials are part of the Christian life. The flesh was crucified on the cross. Therefore, I have died. It continues to try to squirm and to live and to influence and to have its way, but the Spirit of God is there to keep my flesh from carrying me away. That is what makes me saved. That is what makes me saved, is that Jesus keeps me; I do not keep myself.

In verse 23, now you can imagine Jesus would have something to say about this. And it is interesting in verse 22 when Peter rebuked Jesus he says, "**Mercy to you, Lord.**" Interesting he rebuked Him, but he called Him *Lord*. At least he was respectful enough to call Him Lord, even though he was taking charge of Jesus' life. And by the way, that is what happens in our day. People not only rebuke the Lord; they also rebuke the truth of His Word. That is how arrogant and egotistical the flesh is. Refusal to receive the truth of what God's Word says even to the point of rebuking the person or rebuking the Scripture that is being used to point out the truth. That is the flesh. That is the ego.

So in verse 23, **But when Jesus turned, He said to Peter, "Go behind Me, not get behind, it is literally go. "Go behind Me, Satan!"** Interesting. **"You are *an* offense to Me,**

**because you do not think the things of God, but the things of men."** What a statement. Of all the verses in the Bible a Christian should know, it is what these terms mean.

So, He turned around to Peter and He says, "**Go behind me, Satan.**" First of all, notice the position:

### **Go behind me.**

Some English texts say *go after me, get after me*; but it is literally, *go behind me*. That is the thread that goes through all of these verses because Jesus is going to turn around to the disciples and say, "If anybody desires to go behind Me." Not *after me* but *go behind me*. That is very important because positionally everybody is to follow Jesus and the proper position even for Satan is behind Jesus. Not alongside. Not out front. Not over Him. But behind Him.

### **Go behind me, Satan.**

He is not calling Peter, *Satan*. He is calling the influence over Peter, *Satan*. But it is interesting how Jesus would say this to somebody, who just a few verses earlier, we studied how Peter made the confession, "**Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.**" And Jesus said, "**Well flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but you have received revelation from the Father in heaven.**" And so this might have gone to Peter's head. "I have revelation from God and so I'm going to correct and rebuke even Jesus. I have the anointing!" And it is interesting that he would go from receiving revelation from God the Father to being under the influence of Satan himself, the spiritual influence.

**Go behind me, Satan.** Satan is the one who wants the flesh preserved. Satan is the one who does not want harm or difficulty to come to the flesh. And Jesus realizes that and rebukes the influence, **Get behind me, Satan.**

Second thing He says, "**You are an offense to Me.**" The word *offense* is the Greek word **σκάνδαλον** (skandalon), where we get our word *scandalize* from. But in Greek it literally means *a trap, or a hindrance is used*. It is used for a stone that is in a roadway that somebody might trip over. If they are on their way down a path and trip over it, that would be called a **σκάνδαλον** (skandalon). Or it is a trap that they used to use to catch animals with; with a trap spring where the animal would go under the box and they would pull the spring and the box would fall on the animal. That is **σκάνδαλον** (skandalon), a trap. So an offense is somebody who puts something in your way to keep you from getting to your destination, a trap, a hazard. We use the term *hindrance*. "You are a hindrance to me," in other words, "You are hindering me from getting to my destination of death on the cross. You are trying to preserve the flesh. You are trying to look out for the human and not for the spiritual will of God. Go behind me Satan. Satan you are an offense to me."

Listen to this, very important, **Because you do not think the things of God but the things of men.** The word think is the Greek word **φρονέω** (phroneō) that means *frame of mind*. There are various Greek words that describe the function of the brain or of the mind. This word **φρονέω** (phroneō) means *the frame of mind*. Not the individual thoughts, but the frame of mind. Where the mind goes under certain circumstances and when it hears certain things. So when Peter hears *suffering, hardship*, right away his frame of mind is to preserve the flesh and protect

the flesh from any of that suffering from happening. **You do not think the things of God.** Your frame of mind is not on the things of God, but rather on the things of men. You think like man does. You think in the human. You are trying to preserve the human. Do you ever notice that over time as you share with people, or talk with people, or listen to people, that a lot of their understanding about the Scripture is applied to the human realm, not the spirit realm. To protect it, to preserve it, to make it well and healthy, happy all the time. Where spiritually speaking of the things of God, the flesh has been crucified. People are trying to take it off the cross, and say, "Christ didn't die to crucify my sin nature."

So the reason behind the Lord's rebuke and the reason why Peter said what he said is that the condition and pattern of his frame of mind was not on the things of God but rather the things of man. Is that really possible to have happen?

In I Corinthians 3:1-3 Paul in ministering to the Christians in Corinth - he was ministering to a group of people that he considered to be *carnal*. That is just a Biblical word that means *fleshly*. Fleshly Christians, not Spiritual. Even though they were born of the Spirit of God, they still continued in their fleshly ways. He says, **And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto Spiritual people, but as unto carnal (fleshly), even as unto babes in Christ.** A babe in Christ is somebody who functions in the human with human understanding, and does not quite get it yet Spiritually, as to what the Bible is saying.

**I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for even from now on you were not able to bear it, neither now are ye able.** You cannot handle the meat of the Word. The meat of what God's Word is saying. You are still being fed with milk.

**For you are yet carnal.** He says in I Corinthians 3:3. You are still carnal. And in this verse, he uses the word for *carnal* for *fleshly* as being abnormal. The time difference is about five years. And he says, "If you have been feeding on milk consistently for five years you should be ready for the meat." Just like we do with our kids. With the newborns, they get the mother's milk, and they get baby food. And you raise them to the point that they are able to start with solid foods. Paul says, "The Christian life is just like that but," he says, "you are still carnal. After five years you are still a babe in Christ." It should not be that way.

**For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk according to men?** You walk according to the human: how men think, how people think. Look at the way you are acting. You are acting in the flesh. You are responding to each other in the flesh. You are carnal and you are walking - that is, living your life - according to men.

So Jesus said about Peter, "You are thinking the things of man and you're not thinking the things of God." This same word **φρονέω** (phroneō) is found in Philippians 2:5-8 concerning Jesus.

By the way, the book of Philippians is said to be the book about joy, and there is a lot of words about joy in it. But joy is not the theme of the book. The theme of the book of Philippians is fellowship. How to have fellowship with one another in light of the fact that we are human and we are in the flesh. How do we function in the Spirit with one another in

fellowship? Jesus is given as the example. Philippians 2:5, **Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.** The word mind is the word **φρονέω** (phroneō). Let this *frame of mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Jesus had a frame of mind. He had an approach to earthly life and to people here on the earth.

Verse 6, **Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.** Literally, it says He emptied Himself of all the glory of being God in order to come here. He did not give up His Godhead, but He left the reputation behind. He didn't show up and say, "I'm God. I am here. Let's get the Christmas parades going and let's get the human celebration going." And you will notice that as you read through the Bible. Jesus turned down, in fact, He prohibited the human celebrations about Him. When He was born, He was born in the manger in a cave, where the animals are kept. Not pomp and circumstance. A few people were let in on His birth and they came to worship Him, but it was not a worldly affair. It was not something the world stopped to celebrate. So, He being in the form of God, it is not robbery to be equal to God.

**But He made Himself of no reputation** (He left His reputation as God behind) **and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.** Now if you stop and think about it, if you are God, that is pretty low to go, to take on human form.

**And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** That is pretty humble. So basically, what Paul is saying is, "Look at the Lord's approach. Look at His frame of mind. Look at the pattern of His thought." Did He come here to say, "I'm taking on human form so that you can elevate me in front of your church and celebrate me in a humanistic way"? He is saying, "You people let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Have the same approach to life as Jesus did. If anybody had a right to set up human glory here on the earth it was Jesus. But He chose not to. So that He can go the low road and so that He could provide for us by dying our death on the cross.

And so Paul is saying, in you, in your fellowship, the only way you are going to be able to successfully have fellowship with other believers is to humble yourself and take up your cross and follow the Lord. It does not matter what you think. It does not matter what your opinion is. It does not matter how you feel. Those are all human and play no role in the things of God.

So when we hear about suffering and sickness, you see the test is how do we react to that? Do we say, "No way"? Because that is what Peter did. "God have mercy on you Lord, no way this is going to happen." That is how arrogant the ego can be in its attack even against God, and even against God's Word, to protect and preserve the flesh. Even in our churches. And I have been in many committees and churches over the years, where we tried to pick leaders from out of the church who are experts in worldly activities, and worldly things in order to run certain things in the church. Not the Spirit of God but human abilities to humanly run things in the church. It is carnal, functioning according to man, not the Spirit of God.

So we come to this very great text. This is just the beginning because next week Jesus is going to turn and give the commands of discipleship. What the demands of discipleship are. What are the requirements of discipleship? And I will repeat for you again, we are using the

word *discipleship* because Jesus called people to become His disciple. He did not call people to become Christians. He did not call them to become church members. He called them to be His personal, individual, disciple.

So now that Peter has had this confrontation with Jesus and this conflict that took place, Jesus is now going to turn and say "Okay here's what it boils down to. Here is what Peter needs to do. Here is what all people need to do to become my disciple," with regards to the things of your human flesh, your human sin nature, and the Spirit of God.

So next year, yes, next year. I hope that is not prophecy. Next week we get into the all important Commands of Discipleship and take them in depth as we continue in this section.

Let's close with prayer.