

Matthew 16

- ²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*
- ²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"*
- ²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*
- ²⁴ *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*
- ²⁵ *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*
- ²⁶ *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*
- ²⁷ *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*
- ²⁸ *I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

The trouble with holidays is coming back to real life. *For some at present, quarantine restrictions.* Sometimes we come home and find some other real problem or even shock waiting for us. .
Returning to the peak wedding season and finding scaffolding all round the church

Peter had been having a very enjoyable holiday with Jesus and the other d's up in Caesarea Philippi
(describe)

What had made holiday particularly wonderful was Peter had received from Jesus the biggest pat on the back of his life. ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered,*
'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷ *Jesus replied,*
'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* ¹⁹ *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;*

Jesus had just confirmed in a wonderful way that he was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, God's own anointed royal rescuer that Israel had been longing and waiting for centuries. Peter and the other disciples no doubt believed like the rest of Israel that this meant The King who surely would throw out the pagan Romans once and for all and make Israel a free independent nation dedicated to the Lord once again. So surely the next thing would be for Jesus and the disciples to proclaim this around the country, gathering support and then march on Jerusalem with victory against the Romans guaranteed – no doubt with some wonderful supernatural intervention from God himself.

But even the best of holidays don't go on for ever and now Jesus seemed more serious than ever before: saying things like *Yes He did indeed have to go to Jerusalem - but there He would suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders . He would be KILLED - and then something about rising again after 3 days which didn't make any sense to Peter at all*

Peter just knew he had to put a stop to this ridiculous obsession Jesus had about having to be killed
"Never Lord – not in a million years!"

What did Jesus say to Peter ? *"Get behind me, Satan!"*

Bit strong wasn't it ? Peter was one of J's closest friends

What's going on here ? We need to see the big picture.

Ever since Jesus was born there had been a huge battle going on:

Satan was desperate to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross

because if Jesus succeeded in dying on the cross then ultimately this would destroy the hold that Satan had on this world and everyone who believed in Jesus would be rescued from darkness and become part of God's kingdom of light.

So just after Jesus was born, King Herod found out and *tried to have him slaughtered*

Then just after Jesus was baptised, Jesus went into the wilderness and Satan tried to tempt him to use worldly, demonic means to achieve his aims: *showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.* ⁹ *“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”*

Now Satan is having another go:

this time by using one of J's closest friends - Peter.

So when Jesus says: *Get behind me, Satan!* He is not saying that Peter is Satan, but he is saying that Satan is using Peter, speaking **through** Peter to try and tempt him not to take the road that will lead to his death on a cross.

So Jesus tells Satan to go and take a running jump. *Same phrase as when Satan had tried to tempt Jesus in the desert with all the kingdoms of the world.*

Then Jesus tells Peter: *You don't understand, you are looking at things from man's point of view and not from God's.*

Paul writes in *1 Corinthians 13* *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.*

In *Alice through the looking glass* everything is back to front. If you want to get nearer to a place you must walk away from it.

You might say that in God's kingdom everything seems to us to be back to front – although of course it is this world that is back to front and God's kingdom which is the right way round. The way to victory is not by force or power but to let the authorities arrest and crucify Jesus as a common criminal and for Jesus to die on a cross.

And for us the way to life is not by assertively pushing ourselves forward nor even by pursuing happiness *viz Bad banks – huge project successes, big promotions, financial windfalls – but also destroyed relationships, empty lives, loneliness of trying to keep up the successful image,*

The world says to succeed in this life you must put yourself first, you are Number 1. Jesus says the opposite. Put God first, put Jesus first and sometimes that will mean denying your deepest desires or needs.

So Jesus says to all the disciples: *If you want to follow me you must walk in my footsteps and that means **like me** you must deny yourselves and **like me** you must take up your cross For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*

Jesus knew what he was talking about. In the wilderness Satan had tempted Jesus to try to save his life and grab all that the world had to offer; and through Peter Satan was trying to tempt Jesus in the same way again.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote

"When Christ calls a man to follow him, he calls him to die."

What did Jesus mean? Think of those athletes training for the Olympic Games.

For most of these people the most important thing in their life is to win the gold medal. To win that, they are willing to give up almost anything: smoking, drinking, lazing around, any normal kind of social life, lots of kinds of food that they might be really fond of, often their job and any regular income. They are willing to endure all the hardships and loneliness of a punishing training schedule and the likelihood of failure.

In other words, they are 100% dedicated. What for? - a moment of glory and a gold coloured bit of metal to hang around their neck

Jesus says you are playing for much bigger stakes than that: You and I are in a life and death situation and therefore we need battle training

The devil will tell you all sorts of lies about how to have a great life - he will use things like TV, magazines and sometimes even your closest friends

What sort of lies?

If you want to have a great life you must make a lot of money, get to the top of your career, you must win against your rivals or indeed your colleagues, you must give into temptation to get involved in an illicit relationship

ABOVE ALL always put yourself first

J says: it is all lies - you might become rich,
you might even become famous or powerful

but if that is what you *aim* for, you will also become empty inside

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his own soul ? Jesus says: if you want real life - to fulfil all the potential God has put in you, to become the wonderful person God created you to be - then follow me.

It is said that St. Augustine was accosted one day on the street by a former mistress some time after he had become a Christian. When he saw her he turned and walked the other way. Surprised, the woman called out,

"Augustine, it is I". Augustine as he kept going the other way, answered her, "Yes, but it is not I." Augustine had died to his old self.

As Christians we are probably all asking ourselves the question, what does it mean to follow Christ when we can't meet up in the normal way? Jesus'

answer is the same as it has always been: "*deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*"

At times it will be tough:

Tough to make time to read your bible,

Tough to submit to the will of God rather than your own desires.

Tough to put others before yourself – to reach out to the grumpy neighbour across the road.

Tough to share your faith with a friend when the Spirit prompts you - but, Jesus says, do that and you will find eternal life

and as I have said before, eternal life is not just pie in the sky when you die it's also cake on your plate while you wait !

It is purpose, fulfilment, becoming the person you were created to be, knowing deep in your heart the presence and the love of God

and his peace and his joy. It is Life in all its fullness.