

“SATAN’S ATTACK ON JESUS: PETER’S REBUKE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Matthew 16:15-25

Prayer: Holy Father, now more than ever, give us ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to your church. Bind the enemy, remove distractions, glorify your Truth and build up your church, scattered as we are this morning. In Jesus name, Amen.

For those of you taking notes, we will look at four things in our text. Peter’s confession, Jesus’ confession, Peter’s rebuke, and Jesus’ rebuke.

Matthew 16:15-16, Peter’s confession.

Peter makes a stunningly clear and bold confession.

You are the Son of God, having the same character and nature and power as God the Father. You are the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one of God who will save His people from their sins.

Jesus is exceedingly pleased and praises Peter while at the same time making it clear that anytime a person declares the truth about Jesus they have been enabled to do so by God through His Holy Spirit.

Have we made this profession? Can you say this out loud in sincere faith with all your heart? Then know this, that is the hand of the living God in your life. God has touched your heart and opened the blind eyes of a sinner.

Matthew 16:17-23, Jesus’ confession.

So Jesus says, on this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Jesus is saying what He is going to do, He will build His church and He will guard His church.

Then He tells them to tell no one. Why would Jesus say that? Well, it will be real clear as soon as Peter opens his mouth again.

Because they don’t fully understand what they have said. Especially in calling Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. In the Jewish mind, Messiah had come to have political overtones and implications, as in defeating and driving out the Romans.

They know who Jesus is, the Messiah, but they don’t yet understand how He is the Messiah.

Jesus began to show His disciples.

Now that they know He is the Son of God, they must be told something else about the Son of God, something they could never suspect or imagine or even believe, even though told.

They have to be told what kind of Messiah He is going to be, how He is going to save His people.

Do you feel the juxtaposition, the conflict between, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” and “I am going to go to Jerusalem to be killed and die. The Christ, the Son of Man must suffer many things.”

Notice Jesus’ brutal honesty. He holds nothing back.

Jesus tells them where He will suffer, Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices are made.

Jesus tells them who will be the cause of the suffering. Elders, chief priests, scribes, the religious authorities, the experts of Scripture, those most respected and venerated as holy and spiritual. Those who should be the most likely supporters of the Messiah, are actually His greatest enemies. This is what happens when you have the form of godliness without the power. Your religion becomes a dead religion that does no one any good.

It is at times like we are in right now when people’s religion is exposed and put to the test. Whose religion has power to save, power to cleanse and forgive, power to give hope, power to give peace and freedom from fear and anxiety, freedom from the fear of death?

Jesus tells them He will suffer and not just a little bit but many things, and that He will die, not by suicide, but by murder.

I am pretty sure the disciples didn’t hear what Jesus said next.

Jesus tells them what will be the result, He will be raised again, not sometime later, but on the third day.

It is impossible for us to put ourselves in the sandals of the disciples hearing this for the very first time. These words could not be more incomprehensible, more strange, more incongruous, out of the remotest range of possibility.

They have no mental categories for a suffering Messiah. To them Isaiah 53 was about Israel, not about God. The temple sacrifices were never connected to a Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

They had categories for thrones and crowns but not for crosses. They couldn’t even hear the word when Jesus spoke it.

He must go. Absolutely necessary.

But perhaps the most stark thing about all of this is the intentionality of it. Jesus is purposefully, intentionally going to Jerusalem. He is not being coerced, He is not being dragged there against His will, He is not running away from it, He intends to go.

Jesus says He must go to Jerusalem, it is a matter of absolute necessity. He must go because He must die. This is part of the eternal plan of God.

He must because His suffering and death are necessary for us and our salvation. Without the shedding of His blood there is no atonement, no satisfaction of the just wrath of God, no reconciliation with the Father.

We are not much different from the disciples, we 21st century Americans don't have mental categories for suffering, for experiencing pain and heartache and difficulties in life.

Matthew 16:22, Peter's rebuke.

One wonders if Peter is feeling a bit puffed up, full of himself, for making such a bold confession and being praised so highly. He felt emboldened to tell Jesus a thing or two.

I suppose one could try to see some good in this, Peter's love for Jesus. Like when we desire nothing bad to happen to those we love, not able to see what possible good could come from it.

Peter's objection is stated in the strongest possible terms. He uses a double negative to contradict Christ. God would never do this. The Messiah would never suffer death from His own people.

Peter brashly declares it is absurd for the Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer to be treated in the way Jesus described. How can the Lord of life be put to death?

Peter is judging things by his own standard, by his own perception of suffering, and clearly he has it all wrong. Thinking like a man, rather than like God.

Peter is the quintessential modern man, suffering is bad, comfort is good, certainly nothing bad can happen to the Son of God. And really nothing bad should happen to us if He is our God.

Aren't we like that. Nothing like the coronavirus could happen to America. We are the greatest, richest nation in the world, we have the strongest economy, the best health care, the best of everything, sports, entertainment, the good life. We aren't like those other poor countries. Besides we are a Christian nation, right? God would never let this happen to us.

How often are we the pot telling the potter what to do or not do? We are Peter.

Matthew 16:23, Jesus' rebuke.

Jesus rebukes Peter in even stronger terms than Peter used. What could justify such a fierce, harsh, even insulting rebuke against His chosen disciple?

The disciples said and did a lot of stupid things while with Jesus, but none of them ever got a response as strong as this. What was it Peter said that got this severe a response?

I think there are a few reasons.

First, Jesus sees the disguised work of Satan rearing his ugly head again, as He did during the temptation in the wilderness. Just as Satan tempted Jesus to seize glory without a cross, so now is Peter tempting Him. I wonder if the temptation felt stronger coming from a close friend?

Satan is subtle, if he can he will lead us into temptation through a trusted friend, even a best friend, one of our dearest friends. We will be unsuspecting. Adam by Eve. Job by his wife. The kind intentions of a friend can lead us astray.

We must have the courage to speak the truth and to rebuke and correct those who tempt us with error, even dear friends or close family. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Second, Peter was setting his mind on the things of man rather than the things of God.

Is this not the source of all our troubles, when we look to and trust man's wisdom over God's wisdom? The minute we stray from God's ways and from obeying God's truth we fall.

Peter had no theology of suffering and when you don't have that you are going to go wrong every time any trouble comes along.

You are going to ask questions like why me, what did I do wrong, what did I do to deserve this? You are going to ask what kind of God would do a thing like this? Why would God let bad things happen to good people?

Satan is still trying to keep Jesus from suffering and Peter is party to it. Satan will try to tempt us to avoid suffering at all cost, to push it off, to chaff under it.

We need to remember this as we think about and talk about and pray about the coronavirus. Do we have the mind of God or the mind of man?

Do you want to know what the mind of man looks like? Where do we turn for salvation? Wash your hands, stay home, and trust in your government to bail us out by throwing trillions of dollars at it to fix the problem. Money is god.

Not one mention of God or Jesus, not one mention of fearing God or humbling ourselves before Him, not one mention of repentance. Of all the things that are shut down in our country, what is the one thing not shut down? Abortion. You can't have coffee with a friend but you can still take your baby's life. The mind of man.

Our world is created and governed by a personal God. What is going on right now is personal, between God and humanity. Our prayer must be your will be done, not my will be done. Our prayer must be for a turning to the living God in repentance and faith. Our desire must be to see God glorified and His Christ loved and worshiped and obeyed.

Christianity is founded on a suffering Savior. No wonder Jesus is so sharp and unbending in His response. This is the foundation, destroy this and the whole house collapses.

Matthew 16:24-25.

Jesus now teaches how to be God-minded, not man-minded. How to set your mind on the things of God rather than the things of man.

This is a hard truth. It was hard for the disciples to hear that Jesus would be going to a cross. Now Jesus tells us that if we want to follow Him, then we must go to a cross also.

Jesus sacrificed for us and we will be called to do the same. But just as His sacrifice reaped a great blessing, so He promises our sacrifices for Him will also reap a great blessing.

To be a true follower of Jesus means following Jesus to the cross. It means affliction and suffering.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Christianity offers a crown, but not without a cross. The path is by the path of suffering, by sanctification, by dying to self and dying to sin. Everyday our flesh must be crucified, the world must be denied and the devil must be resisted. We are called to be Christ-centered and cross-centered.

Jesus says it simply in three points.

First, deny yourself. Uproot any craving for glory, for importance, for boasting.

This isn't about giving up chocolate for Lent. It's about giving up ourselves, our wills, our ways. Putting Jesus and others first.

You want to know one way to do this during this crisis. Don't whine, grumble, complain, moan about how hard it is or how bad you have it or how much you are suffering. Don't make everyone else miserable in your misery.

Let us suffer victoriously, suffer after the manner of Christ, willingly and joyfully for His sake.

Paul and Silas sang while they were in prison. Job chose to bless the name of the Lord. Jesus fixed His eyes on the joy set before Him.

Second, take up your cross.

Whatever your cross is, always remember Jesus carried a heavier one for you.

This doesn't just mean something that happens to you or your body. This refers to some active step, some action to do something for others, to care, to serve, to give, to help, to sacrifice, to spend and be spent, to suffer the loss of something for the sake of the Gospel just as Jesus did.

In other words, to sacrifice ourselves to help others. But what can we do when we are told social distancing is the best way not to spread the virus?

One place it might happen is when we all get our check from the government. For some of us it will be just an extra blessing, for others a life line. All of us should tithe a tenth of it to the church. But for some of us, if you don't really need it we could give some or all of it to the benevolence fund or tuition assistance, or someone you know who is in need.

I am hearing of people going to the grocery for others, picking up and delivering; making sure people have what they need, using technology to encourage and comfort Christians and share hope.

Third, follow me. To believe Jesus is who He says He is and He came to do as He said.

By following Jesus, we receive the enabling power to deny ourselves and carry a cross.

Is Jesus more important to you than anything else, your own comfort, your own safety, your own job, your own family, your own life?

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Implications and application.

May we never fear or despise suffering when it is meant for our salvation and sanctification. Our Savior came intentionally to suffer and to sanctify all our suffering by giving it meaning and purpose. He calls us to suffer as He did for a greater glory.

Let's strengthen each other, hold up each other's arms. Let's fight fear and anxiety by remembering God's promises, that His Church is built on the Rock of Jesus who was faithful to His promise to rise on the third day. Our suffering Savior is a risen Savior.

Husbands and fathers, hold up the arms of your wives and children. Don't mock or ridicule or make light of their fears and anxieties. Those are real, don't be dismissive. Listen, help, pray, use Scripture, not just your opinion, not just your bravado.

Teach your children. The Bible is filled with truth, with God's wisdom, with God's perspective, the mind of God. This virus is a scary monster under the bed, shine the light of God's Word to dispel the monster.

Let us be more diligent than ever to set our minds on Jesus, on the things of God rather than the things of man.

After 15 minutes of CNN or nightly news you can start to forget there is a God or any hope or help from heaven. Let's fill our minds with Scripture, with God's Word. Use that letter I sent you yesterday.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is our suffering Savior. May He be our rock in the midst of our suffering, and by His grace may we suffer and bear witness to Jesus.

II Corinthians 4:17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Pastoral Prayer 03/29/20

Holy Father, we call on you who inhabits the highest heavens who dwells in unapproachable light and fills all creation with your glory, power and presence. We humble ourselves and bow down before you as the sovereign Lord and Master of all creation.

With the Apostle Paul we acknowledge the incomprehensible, unfathomable depth of your wisdom and knowledge and power. How unsearchable are your judgments and how inscrutable are your ways.

From before the foundations of the earth you determined all things, you ordained all our days, you fixed the day of our conception and the day of our death and you fill all our days with purpose and meaning. Apart from you we are nothing, we have nothing, and can do nothing. As your Word says, what do we have that we have not received? Who of us can boast of anything, it is all mercy and grace.

Holy Father, in these confusing and difficult days give us unshakable confidence in your never-failing, perfect, and purposeful providence that orders every event on earth.

May your providence turn every fear into faith, every evil into good, every earthly loss into spiritual gain. May your providence sweeten every inconvenience and disruption in our lives, and comfort our hearts and minds in the knowledge of your goodness. May all that seems bitter to us become sweet in the knowledge that our afflictions come to us from a loving and good Father who causes all things for our eternal good. May your providence remind us that since you could have stopped this and didn't, this is part of your wise and good plan.

May your providence enable us to say the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. May your providence cause us to say, if it pleases the Lord, it pleases me. May your providence give us a confident assurance you hold the future in your hand and you hold us.

Holy Father, you are shaking the nations, you are humbling all mankind, all governments. Pour out your Spirit and open blind eyes and make hard hearts soft, convicting of sin and idolatry, turning our nation and all nations to repentance and faith in the living God and His Christ. Spread a fear of the Lord across our land as the waters cover the sea.

Start with your church, start with us. We have taken so much for granted. We have been negligent in spiritual things, we have been at ease, coasting, drifting, not taking our faith and your Word seriously. We have turned your Sabbath into our day for doing what we want, pushing you to the edges, giving you time if we have nothing better to do. And now the doors of all churches are closed, what more could you do to get our attention? Help us to listen.

Don't let this be a season where we just wait for this to pass, where we take a vacation from you. Don't let us remain unchanged by this. May our world never be the same, or get back to normal; that would be a tragedy greater than the virus.

May your power and truth and grace melt our hearts, change our hearts, enable us to see you and hear you more clearly. In the quiet of this slower pace speak to us, draw us to yourself.

Make Jesus and His life and His sacrifice for us be our richest treasure, our greatest desire, our deepest love and purest hope.

By your Spirit's power and presence touch every home and heart this prayer reaches. Calm our fears, comfort our hearts, heal our diseases, forgive our sins, supply what we need, and keep us in fellowship with you and each other. Help us as a church family to minister to the needs of one another. And now bless us as we continue in worship in our homes, may you be worshipped and glorified. Amen.