

Matthew 16:21-26. 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?*

What's on your mind?

1. Set your mind on the things of God.
2. Set your mind on the words of Christ.

What's on your mind? Maybe someone has asked you that question recently as you sat silently lost in thought. There seems to be a lot to think about these days. Our thoughts may dwell on our health and the health of others. Our thoughts may easily be consumed by information on the latest reports or we might ruminate on some issue at work or mull over some school matter. Our thoughts take us to the upcoming election and hover around the same core issues that we feel ought to be addressed. Our minds circle around such topics for minutes and hours on end. We wonder about the weather and the economy, about personal finances and family. What's on your mind? There might feel like there's a lot right now. It is good to come to God's house and to be quiet and be still and enjoy the peace and rest that God gives. But even as we come before God in worship and prayer, our list of concerns and anxieties can pile up in our minds. Our thoughts may steadily drift to what waits for us on the other side of this worship time. Have the concerns of the day-to-day swelled so much that we barely take time to consider our spiritual blessings? Have the concerns of the day-to-day overwhelmed our concern for our spiritual needs?

The Lord Jesus graciously sets the cross before our eyes in our lesson for today. He puts it on center stage as priority number one for us to see. Both in this lesson and through this lesson, Jesus encourages his disciples to set their minds on the things of God.

Certainly, we see in our text that Jesus did. Jesus had his mind set on carrying out the will of God. As he continues to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God special focus is now given to his journey to the cross. Our text spells out this shift in emphasis when Matthew writes, "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.” Jesus had made reference to his departure before. He made mention of his coming death in more subtle imagery, but now he begins to overtly address his course to the cross and the tomb. In amplified terms, he would now begin to speak of his journey to the cross and how he would rise from the dead.

He does this to prepare his disciples for the difficult journey that was in store for him and also the difficult journey that was in store for them. He speaks in this way to inform his disciples, to prepare them, and to chase away any preconceived notions that Jesus was some sort of an earthly Messiah. But it appears that Peter had his mind set on the earthly things such as the pleasures of day to day comfort and success rather than eternal treasures. Even though Peter is still very much fresh off his good confession, “Lord, you are the Christ, the Son of living God” it appears that Peter had still not really wrapped his head around what that title meant for the life and work of his friend Jesus. Perhaps he was puffed up a bit from the commendation that Jesus had given him, and so Peter in this bit of entitled air now feels it right to pull Jesus aside when Jesus starts speaking in such serious tones. ***22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”***

What was Peter thinking? He had just given this wonderful confession, confirming that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Why would he object to Jesus’ mission to suffer and die, when we all know that is what Jesus was sent here to do? But here is the problem, while Peter may have just begun to grasp who the person of Jesus Christ was, he still did not fully understand the work and mission of Jesus as the promised Savior of the world. When Jesus starts to speak about suffering and dying at the hands of cruel men, Peter was thinking about his friend and beloved teacher and trying to steer him away from harm. His mind was on earthly things and his friendship with Jesus. And with his mind so focused on the here and now he was standing in the way of God’s eternal plan of salvation. With his words, Peter, the rock, who had just given such a beautiful bedrock statement of faith had now become a serious stumbling block to the cross. Jesus had come to suffer and die to take away the sins of the world. He had come to defeat sin and death and hell and give us eternal life. Jesus had set his face like flint in stony determination to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die as the Scriptures had foretold. And Peter’s comments were poised to chip away at Jesus’ resolve to carry out the will of God. How would Jesus respond to the passionate plea of his friend? ***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.”*** Notice how harshly Jesus speaks to Peter. He goes to the extent of calling his friend Satan because Peter was standing in opposition to God’s plan of salvation and standing in the way of Jesus going to the cross. But Jesus would not give sway. He would not be turned away by the devil’s schemes even if it meant such a sharp rebuke for his friend Peter. ***“Get behind me Satan!”***

We know what the mind of Jesus was focused on! His mind was on us! Thankfully, Jesus had as his top priority the eternal blessings that he would win for us on the cross. He would go to the cross in fulfillment of all Scriptures. He would go to the cross to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. He would set aside his own well-being and lay down his very own life to make sure that this would all be ours. Jesus had his mind set on the things of God rather than on the things of men. And it showed.

Can you imagine, in a matter of moments after making a good confession about our Lord that we would lose sight of the things of God? I don't think we have to think too hard or search too far for a time when we stood in a similar place as Peter. After making a good confession with our lips here at church our minds quickly drift back into matters of day to day, to the point where that as we leave this house of worship, we might even try to pull God aside and make some sort of side deal with the Son of the Living God. Hey Jesus, I made my appearance in your house, I said the right things, and now I expect you to bless this week, to take away all my problems. If not, you can expect a negative review from me very soon!

There is a very human part of us that reaches for such a theology of glory, rather than the theology of the cross. If I say the right things, and go through the right routine, then God will bless me with my best life now. At least he ought to. But that is hardly the kind of life that Jesus describes. Instead, this is what Jesus says. ***"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?"***

Our minds can get so set on the things of this world that we soon become consumed with the concepts of comfort and care. Our relationships and our well-being and things like success and ease of life become our chief priorities. And the devil prowls around looking for any chance to stand in between us and our Savior, so that when earthly trouble and pain come our way - and in this sinful world they will - he will be quick to plant those seeds of doubt. Where is your God when life is so tough? Doesn't he care? Why does he seem so far away when your health falters, and your marriage is on the rocks, and when your job and your finances are hanging by a thread? What good to you is a crucified God? And then the devil doubles down when we have to suffer for the sake of being a Christian. When circumstances and culture stand to steer us away from the will of God, oh how our human nature wants to follow the easier path. And the devil may even use friendly neighbors and co-workers to make that path even more alluring. But in the end where does such an earthly focused life lead. Even if we were to gain the whole world, even if we were to live a life that put our needs entirely first, and we lived for our passions and indulged every creature comfort, where would that lead? Jesus challenges us to consider this as he speaks these words, ***²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"***

Set your mind on the things of God, and marvel at the goodness of our God. Our God in his love for you set his mind on your eternal well-being. He devoted himself to

winning salvation for you. He resisted every temptation and went the way of the cross to save your soul. The rational world may stand with the devil and scream, what good is a God who is humbled crucified! And at our times our eyes may be fooled to follow. But in love, the Savior speaks with words of rebuke and love so that our minds may be set on the things of God. As we consider the gracious will of God, with hearts of faith, we begin to see this crucified God means everything to us! For our God gave his all to save us and win the eternal victory for us. He denied the easy way, he shook off the temptation and allures of popularity and pleasure, to die in your place. He resisted every temptation that we endure, lived a holy life, and shed His innocent blood so that he could win for you eternal treasures that do not fade with age or circumstance. He took on the shame of the cross to give us lasting glory. That is why he came, to take away your sins, to give you his righteousness, and win for you a home in heaven. Jesus knew that this was so important that he was willing to suffer and die and rise again so that we too may live with him forever.

Jesus knows what's best. He knows these treasures won for us on the cross far outlast any earthly pleasure. He knows that troubles will come in this life of sin and so he holds out for us treasures that will last. When our health falters, when a job is lost when finances crash, when relationships are strained and broken, when all the pleasures and the treasures and the promises of this world are exposed to be flimsy and temporary and here one day and gone tomorrow, we are held up, dear friends, by the good news that Jesus won for us eternal salvation. Jesus went to the cross and paid for our sins in full and has stored up for us treasures in heaven that no earthly problem can change or affect or alter. Because Jesus kept in mind the will of God and went so resolutely to the cross, heaven has been won for us. Because Jesus had us on his mind and heart as he went to the cross and rose from the tomb, lost and condemned creatures like us are spared from the eternal suffering that we deserve. And nothing, no earthly pain or pressure, can change that truth of Christ's eternal kingdom. The Lord Jesus has given us the gift of heaven and if he has taken care of that top priority, he most certainly will care for our earthly needs as well.

And so he calls us to follow him on the path that would keep us near to him for all eternity. He knows how deceptive and alluring and dangerous the trappings of this world may be. Therefore, hear the Savior's instruction for those who would follow him. *Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.* Watch out for the ways of this world that would lead us astray and set your mind on the things of God and the Word of Christ and be blessed by Jesus Christ. For he is the Son of the living God, who came to live and die and rise again to save your eternal soul! Amen.