

## Matthew 16:21-26

<sup>21</sup>From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again. <sup>22</sup>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup>But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men.” <sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup>In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?

- I. Glory that can only come through the cross
- II. Glory our sinful nature wants without the cross
- III. Glory when we understand life lost is really life gained

Sermon for September 13, 2020 Pentecost 15; St. Paul's, Green Graden MI

Text: Matthew 16:21-26

Theme: “The Living Church Awaits its Future Glory”

“He's alive!! He's alive!! The enemies couldn't keep him down. They couldn't defeat him! Jesus really is the Christ.” Imagine the disciples' wonder. Imagine their joy. And as they thought about it more and more during the weeks that followed, they could see the glory--glory they would share in. But they needed to think back--they needed to remember what Jesus had told them months before he went to the cross.

Peter had given voice to the belief and faith shared by all of Jesus' disciples. He confessed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. But none of them truly understood what that meant. Had they been influenced by their fellow Jews who wanted a conquering hero on a white stallion--the kind of hero our sinful nature desires? The kind of hero who will automatically kill all our human enemies? And that was how they saw the church and its life--a life of glory through Jesus and his almighty power.

And that was a big reason why his capture and beating and crucifixion had been such a shock to the disciples. When Jesus predicted it Peter said, “May you receive mercy, Lord, this will never happen to you.” He saw the life of the church tied up with Christ's glory. But he and his sinful nature did not listen to Jesus--they did not want to hear that glory was the end result for the church--it lay in the future. He didn't want to hear that there was a cross for him. But it was

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God's plan not only for Jesus to carry his cross and be crucified, but when he had redeemed his church and given his believers the full life he promised by his suffering and death, that the church in its life on earth would also carry its cross. Because, you see, just as the Lord Jesus fulfilled his mission by the cross, so his church in the world must live its life and fulfill its mission by carrying its cross. This means you and me as living stones in Jesus' Church. We live because of Jesus, we fulfill his commission for us because he bought us back from all our sins. And while we live and work and carry our cross we await the glory we will have in the future.

It is so human for us to look at the world and how battles and competitions between human beings happen and what the end results are and we think that this is how things happen in God's way of thinking. But as Paul later wrote, God so often uses the weak things of the world and the despised things and the things that are NOT to nullify the things that ARE. Now when Jesus told his disciples that he would soon suffer and die, Paul had not yet written those words. But God had often operated that way in history. Out of seeming weakness, even sorrow or death, or humanly impossible odds, God brought victory, he brought happiness, he fulfilled promises.

Now the disciples had seen Jesus' miracles. They had seen him feed people with a few loaves of bread. They had seen him escape the murderous intentions of the crowd in the Nazareth synagogue. They believed he was and IS the almighty God. So how could his enemies capture him and nail him to the cross? Not only did they see that as impossible. They believed that Jesus could defeat his enemies by merely speaking the words. But what Peter and so many other Jews really did not grasp is that the real enemy is NOT the hatred of other human beings. On Maundy Thursday, in the Garden, Jesus' enemies had demanded to know which of the men in the group who was praying was Jesus of Nazareth. And did not Jesus cause all of his enemies to fall backwards when he told them HE himself was Jesus? Yes, he had power over them. But they were not the enemy he needed to defeat for us.

This is what Peter could not see or understand fully just yet. Like so many Jews, Peter seemed to believe that the Savior of the world, God's Son would get rid of human enemies, obstacles to Israel's earthly glory. Many believed he would once again restore Israel to the golden age it had enjoyed under David and Solomon. But those days were gone. That earthly glory would be no more. But something greater was in store.

In Revelation we read of many scenes of believers enjoying the glories of heaven. But those glories did not come by winning victory in a human war.

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Those glories are not given to believers because of some human concept of victory. Crushing his enemies on earth was NOT the plan Jesus' Father sent him to carry out. In John 3 while He is talking with Nicodemus Jesus says, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. The enemy Jesus wanted to defeat was sin and the power IT had over us.

The only way he chose to do that was through the cross. The cross was a most horrible way to die. It was reserved for criminals, mostly non-Roman citizens who had rebelled against Rome itself. That kind of death branded Jesus as a rebel and a sinner, one who had rebelled against God. One who had done horrible things by misusing God's name, by committing the sin of lust in our hearts, by coveting things that don't belong to us, by speaking unloving things about our neighbor? Who had done those things?!! You and I have done those things. Those were our sins, sins that Jesus took on himself, sins for which Jesus died as a rebel against God. It was by the cross that Jesus chose to defeat sin, so his cross in effect is our cross, because by his death he defeated sin. By his life that was absolutely free of any sin, or rebellion or hateful attitude toward God or man. He proved his life is perfect and holy by going to the cross to pay for our sins against God.

During holy week, days before he died he again predicted his suffering and death to some Greeks who had come to meet him. And even while he told of his suffering and death he also spoke of the glory he would receive as he carried out his Father's will: **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."** Yes, Jesus came to win glory, but the glory he won for himself, the glory that we as members of his Christian church will receive in heaven by grace through faith in Jesus, that glory could come only through the cross of Jesus—through death and pain and punishment. It hardly seems possible; in fact as far as Peter was concerned it WAS impossible. LORD, he protested, this will NEVER happen to you. And that is exactly what our sinful nature says, too, doesn't it? Our sinful nature says, yes, Lord, give me the glory, but not through the cross.

But listen to Jesus. He plainly and clearly says, **"If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."** Do you want to follow Jesus? Do you really WANT to follow him? Then deny yourself. That doesn't mean living a life of poverty like some believers think of denying oneself. No, denying yourself means, recognizing the desires of your sinful nature and

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turning your back on those desires. And we forget what a temptation it is to love our sinful nature and obey it, when school mates say to us, “Oh, you don’t have to do what the teacher says. None of us obey that rule; nobody gets punished.” Or if your parents aren’t home and you aren’t supposed to leave the house, but one of your friends, says, “Oh, it’s OK. My parents don’t mind and you’ll be home before your parents come back. And even if they do come back before you go home just tell you were only over here a couple of minutes.” You see, how our sinful nature loves itself. It does not want to serve and follow Jesus, it wants to serve itself and its desires.

And we don’t outgrow those sinful desires either do we? They may take different forms but my sinful nature doesn’t want to serve or follow Jesus. How is it denying our sinful nature and serving Jesus if when we have time off we make plans and in making those plans we are inconsiderate of the rest of our family? How is it denying our sinful nature and following Jesus when we wish evil on someone, whether we misuse God’s name or not? How are we denying our sinful nature and following Jesus when our human desires take precedence over time spent with God’s Word? But thanks be to our merciful God that Jesus’ cross and the death he endured there for us cleanses us from our sins of failing to deny ourselves and follow him. And so his cross changes our lives. His cross and the full pardon from sin it brings each of us IS the reason we take up our cross of service to our Savior.

Because when you think about it, Jesus’ cross was really all about serving us, wasn’t it? His cross was an instrument of human torment and death, but it was the way Jesus served US to take away our sins. So now, the cross we take up is the cross of service to our Lord Jesus who served us. Why, because we can put down our sinful nature, and refuse to obey it. It wants glory its own way. But Jesus shows us he has already won glory for us. So serving him is how we show that he has won glory for us.

Once in a nursing home a nurse who was a Christian was ministering to the needs of the residents, emptying bed pans, changing dirty bed sheets, some of the least pleasant tasks you can imagine. One woman who was a visitor saw her devoted service and said to her, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” And the nurse simply replied, “Neither would I.” She didn’t have to live for glory. Her Savior had already won it for her. And so we also in serving our Savior as we serve others do not have to live for glory. We have it already. It is waiting for us in heaven and Jesus is even now, preparing a place for us there. That friends, is the life we truly want, isn’t it? Life with our Lord in heaven is our goal—the end

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result of everything Jesus did. But in order to have that life we must lose our life first.

And when we first hear these words of Jesus, they sound so inconsistent to us don't they? They sound absurd and impossible. How can you find your life by losing it? But think of it. Jesus, by his suffering and death on the cross has WON life for us with him in heaven. We have that life because Jesus paid for our sins, he paid for every time I have failed to deny my sinful nature and refused to follow him. So, since my Lord Jesus has glory waiting for me in heaven, the only life I have to lose is my own selfish goals, my own wrongful love of life in this world. And don't we sometimes love life in this world a little too much? Don't we love life and we don't want things to end when everything is going well; when we have pleasures and enjoyments. And pleasure and enjoyments are not wrong in God's eyes. He has created all things to be received with thanksgiving. But what if we start to make those things the goal of our lives, that we work for those things day after day and hour after hour, rather than remembering Jesus redeemed us not so we could have glory in this world. While we live in this world, we still remember that this world and this life is something we will need to lose in the end, because Jesus has gained for us a greater glory that we will receive in heaven. The apostle John wrote, "**Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**" John shows us the reason we want to lose our lives in this world, because the life to come is ready and waiting for us when our Savior comes again.

And isn't life here worth losing anyway? What will we accomplish by serving ourselves and our own human desires? We would simply be showing that we are no better than the world and we would really be part of the world. That kind of life is really walking death. Losing our lives here in this world really means giving back to God our lives in this world that he redeemed. We live in a world full of sin and sinners. But when we lose our lives in service to him, we are really saying that we are willing to sacrifice our lives in service to our Lord because we KNOW what he has waiting for us in heaven. And so service is never really about self-worth or proving WE are worth something in this world. We are showing, witnessing, proclaiming, that our Lord Jesus who was crucified, who died the horrible death of a criminal and took on himself the pain of hell for my sins, that LORD JESUS is worthy of my life given to him as a sacrifice of love. We can offer that sacrifice daily, giving glory to our Savior, and while we give glory, we point to him and to his everlasting love for us. His love for us, will never die, and so we will always want to keep alive our love for him. Amen.