

Jesus Predicts His Death

Matthew 16:20—27

The last lesson highlighted the ministry of Peter and the 11 Disciples during the Millennial Kingdom. Verses 18—19 are so often misunderstood and misapplied to today's church that it is hard to see these verses any other way. However, when viewed in the context of the coming Kingdom with the realization that the Disciples will be ruling in the Kingdom with Christ (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30) we can come to the understanding that they will be acting as judges, as Matthew 18 points out. They will be performing these duties in accordance with the Mosaic Law.

Deuteronomy 17 has specific instructions that are to be followed in arbitrating a dispute. Verse 8 details what they were to do if the matter was too hard for them to make a proper judgment. It would go to the judge of that day to a place chosen by the Lord. In other words, they were acting as the Supreme Court of the land getting their direction from God.

Deuteronomy 17:8—10 ⁸ If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose; ⁹ And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: ¹⁰ And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee:

This is exactly what Peter and the 11 will be doing in the Millennial Kingdom. They will be judging perfectly the hard cases because they will be getting input from the Lord. This is what Matthew 18:15—18 is all about. They will be decreeing God's perfect judgments on an earth that will have a heavenly government, the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter and the 11 Disciples have been promised to be given this power and authority (Matthew 16:19; 19:28).

Tell no man (verse 20)

It seems strange that Jesus would command the Disciples to tell no man that He was the Messiah. Didn't He come to earth to announce to Israel that He was their Messiah? This edict was in response to Israel's rejection. The vast majority of Israel and almost all of the leaders wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Many wanted Him to feed them and heal them but when things started to get rough, even those who were following Him left (John 6:26; 66).

Jesus wasn't just rejected by the Pharisees but they were plotting to kill Him (Luke 4:28—30; 22:2; John 5:18; 7:1). They hated Him because He was undermining their power over the people (John 11:48). When Jesus is put to death it will be done according to prophecy, in the right manner and at the right time. Since it was not yet time for His death, Jesus withdraws Himself from Israel and specifically from the leaders of Israel. He is avoiding them until it is the proper time and then He announces that it is time to go to Jerusalem (Matthew 20:18). Telling the Disciples not to tell anyone was done to keep all events aligned with Scripture.

Jesus announces His death (verses 21—23)

Shortly after Peter pronounced that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, and Jesus pronounced that Peter would be given authority on this soon-to-be-established Kingdom, He began explaining to the Disciples that He would be going to Jerusalem and be put to death by the elders, chief priests and scribes. He also said He would be brought back to life again after three days. Mark 8:31 states He told them openly or plainly that these things would happen.

This is the first time that Jesus told them this would happen and they could not understand what He was telling them and Peter actually rebuked Jesus. All these months Jesus had been teaching them about the

Kingdom and how they will need to suffer through the Tribulation but nothing about Him dying. This was quite a shock to the Disciples and something that they denied could happen. It was beyond their understanding that the person whom they knew, through the working of the Father, would go into Jerusalem, defeat Israel's enemies and take the throne would actually be going into Jerusalem to die. Is it any wonder that Peter rebuked the Lord for saying such a thing?

The Disciples still had much to learn. Instead of accepting what Jesus was teaching, their faith wavered and they rejected what He said. Faith needs to be built on substance and begins with knowledge. When Peter heard Jesus say He would die he was not able to accept it because he was not operating by faith. I'm sure he was speaking for all the Disciples. Peter was actually acting as Satan would want him to act. Jesus told Peter he was speaking from a purely human viewpoint (of the flesh) and not from a godly position (from Scripture). If Jesus did not go to Jerusalem and die and rise again then mankind would not have a Savior. If Peter had known and understood the Old Testament prophecies he would have known that their Messiah would have to die. All of these things were actually hidden from them (Luke 18:34). The Father had not yet revealed these truths to them. It was only after Christ rose from the dead that their eyes were opened and they remembered what Jesus told them (Luke 24:6—12) and their hearts burned within them with excitement as they listened to Christ open up the Old Testament prophecies to them (Luke 24:25—27).

Pick up your cross (verses 24—27)

Here is another concept that is taken out of context and completely misapplied for us today. Jesus had just announced that He would be put to death then says that if anyone wishes to be a follower of Him then they too need to pick up their cross and follow Him. Could He have made this statement any clearer? Those who follow Christ need to be willing to follow Him to their death.

Today people interpret their cross as being some problem in their life that bothers them, a burden that they must bear. Even the world talks of burdens as being their cross to bear. Shakespeare probably made the phrase popular by using it in his plays. This verse is also used to show people what they need to do in order to be saved. Those who are not willing to die for Christ cannot be saved. Since these verses do not apply to us in this dispensation we need to view them in light of the dispensation they were spoken.

Jesus spoke these words as the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached. This Gospel looked forward to the soon-to-come Millennial Kingdom and therefore those looking for the Kingdom needed to be prepared for the Tribulation. These verses have the Tribulation in mind and warn that those who are believers during that time will need to stay true to Christ even to the point of death. Those who turn away will be turning to everlasting damnation.

This goes along with the parable of the sower. The seed that fell on the stony ground accepted the Gospel but as soon as the heat of the Tribulation comes they will die because they have no root (Matthew 13:6, 21). Those who do not endure unto the end, either of their life or the Tribulation, will be condemned when Christ comes (Matthew 10:22; 24:13). Only those who continued in Christ's words would remain a disciple (John 8:31). Those who are truly bearing their cross will be the ones who may be put to death during the Tribulation. Those who do not continue to bear their cross will no longer be a disciple of Christ and will meet with eternal damnation. Being a disciple at that time will require them to give up everything including their life (Luke 14:33). Those who don't completely follow Christ will be lost.

The teaching to the disciples in Jesus' time does not apply to us today. All of these things related to the millennial Kingdom and are unrelated to this Age of Grace. It's interesting that Paul never even uses the term disciple or discipleship to describe those of us in the Body of Christ. He does. However, call us ambassadors as representatives of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

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