

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

MATTHEW 16:21-28

THE words with which this paragraph opens indicate a new beginning in the mission of the King. **“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things . . . and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”**

We are not necessarily to understand that He at once said all these things exactly in this form. He then began to tell them these things. This declaration is Matthew's summary, and constitutes the key to the final section of the Gospel. The ministry of Jesus was no longer mainly a ministry to the multitudes, but a ministry to His own. He devoted himself largely to preparing them for the experience of His Passion. Presently He went up to Jerusalem in solemn and Kingly glory in order to denounce and reject the whole Hebrew nation. Finally we see Him passing through the Passion experiences to complete triumph.

From here, then, to the end, we see the King:

- First, unveiling His Cross to His own disciples;
- Secondly, authoritatively and officially casting off the Hebrew nation;
- Thirdly, giving His disciples the program of the coming economy;
- Finally, passing to His Passion, and His triumph.

At the commencement of this division dealing with the Passion of the King, we have this section; and there is a sense in which everything that follows is mirrored in this scene. It is, as it were, a preface to the rest. In it we see all the principles operating discovered to the end of the story.

These, moreover, are the principles of action from then until now, and throughout the whole of this age. The understanding of these is absolutely necessary to us at all times as we face our work for our Lord and Master.

The first matter of importance is that of the antagonism revealed.

Christ began to talk of His Cross, and Peter at once objected. For a moment, very reverently, let us forget the persons, Christ and Peter, and see the antagonistic principles.

The contrast is made plain in the words,

“The things that be of God – those that be of men” “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

Jesus began to say that He must suffer; Peter began to object and to say, **“Be it far from Thee, Lord.”** The things of God are Christ’s estimate of necessity and of method.

The Son of Man **“must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer . . . and be killed . . . and be raised again.”**

The things of men are revealed in Peter’s thought, “Lord, not that; pity Thyself, have mercy upon Thyself; that be far from Thee; anything but that.”

- The things of God; the method of the Cross that merges into the victory of resurrection.
- The things of men; the method of self-seeking that shuns the Cross, and ends in ultimate destruction.

Let us look at these things of God more carefully. **“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem.”**

Jerusalem was the place of danger and peril. The line of policy was to miss Jerusalem. The line of expediency, from human standards, was that, wherever else He went, He should not go to Jerusalem. And He began by saying The Son of Man **“must go unto Jerusalem.”** The emphasis of that **“must”** continues throughout the statement. **“He must . . . suffer many things,”** and **“must . . . be killed,”** and **“must . . . be raised again the third day.”**

If we thus repeat the **“must”** before each of these declarations we notice that there is a value in the **“must”** which may be interpreted along the line of human experience and passion, and that there is a value in the **“must”** which defies any such interpretation. There is a sense in which the **“must”** was the **“must”** of human surroundings.

“He must . . . suffer . . . and be killed,” because that was the natural outcome of all that He had been saying and doing.

It had been made perfectly evident in the period of the propaganda that men would not have Him, that they would reject Him. They were declining His ethic, refusing His ideal, laughing at Him, and attempting to get rid of Him; and He said to His disciples, “There is only one issue to all this; I am compelled to go to Jerusalem, I must suffer, I must be killed.”

It was heroism, if we only look at it from the low level of human standpoint. Why must He? These men would not have made Him suffer, and would not have killed Him if He would have accommodated the standard of His teaching to their ideals. But in the mind of the King there was the **“must”** of a tremendous conviction, and an absolute loyalty to that conviction.

It was as though Jesus said:

- I cannot lower My standard,
- I cannot deny My ideal,
- I cannot unsay My manifesto.
- I have not been uttering theories which I have learned in schools, and which can be abandoned upon occasion.
- I have talked out of the fiber of My personality.

I must. And the “**must**” means that men who have shown their hostility will carry it out to consummation, and I shall suffer and die. But that is not the deepest note. His last word was not of suffering. He did not end with dying. There was another must. He must be “**raised again.**”

- That was not the language merely of an obedient man.
- It was not the language of a man who said; “Well, I have done my best and I am prepared to die for it.”
- It was the language of One Who knew that He held in His own hands the issue of all the way through which He was going.

“I am Master of the suffering, Master of the killing. I must be raised again.”

That was the “must” of the Divine procedure. I must go unto Jerusalem; and the immediate result will be that I shall suffer and be killed; but beyond that will operate the divine power; I must be raised up.

- That “**must**” was older than the circumstances.
- That “**must**” came thundering in music out of eternity.

When Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem, saying, I must go, and I must suffer, and I must be killed, and I must be raised up again, the force propelling Him was not merely the force of human devotion to an ideal, it was the force of His own ageless life; the Divine and eternal counsels of God were operating in Him and through Him, and driving Him along that pathway.

That is what Peter, who misunderstood Him for a little while, came to understand presently. When we turn to the Acts of the Apostles and listen to Peter preaching for the first time in the power of Pentecost, the man who had shunned the Cross because he did not understand it, said, “**Him**” that is, Jesus “**being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.**”

Thus he put the “**must**” back upon its true basis. He came at last to know that when Jesus said “**must**,” He spoke with the authority of the eternal counsel of God, and was acting under the impulse of the things that are ageless and abiding; that He knew all the movements of eternity; that he saw through the mists of the moment all that lay beyond; past the bloody baptism of His Passion to the radiant morning of His crowning. These are “**the things of God.**”

But what are “the things of men”?

First, the things of men are characterized by their lack. Peter did not see the ultimate, did not feel the original. He lived in the small conceptions of the immediate. That is always faulty and a failure. No man can live this hour unless he feels behind him the infinite movement of the ages gone, and before him the infinite pull of the ages unborn. If we live in the power of the things unseen we march to certain victory.

Peter, in his letter, subsequently referred to those who see only the things which are near, having forgotten the cleansing. Near-sightedness! Peter was suffering from it at this point. He did not hear the music of the past; did not see the light of the future; his was the limited outlook, and therefore the present was misunderstood. And this was the attitude of all the disciples. They feared the present, and that because of the enthronement of self.

They were still living for self, they were still considering self. Jesus Christ was so absolutely void of self-centered life that it did not matter to Him what suffering He endured if the great and ultimate victory should be achieved.

We read, “**For the joy that was set before Him,**” He “**endured the Cross.**” Not the joy of His own victory but of God’s victory. It was His joy to know that God, through the processes of His suffering, would win His victory and triumph.

Peter saw only the things of men; present darkness, present pain, and present suffering. When he said to Jesus, “**Be it far from Thee,**” he was speaking in affection, but it was near-sighted affection.

When we stand in the presence of a soul suffering in the will of God, and employ such words as these, are we not asserting our own inability to bear that very pain, and is not that a refined form of the assertion of self-love within us?

- A self-centered man is self-circumferenced;
- A God-centered man is a God-circumferenced man,
- To be God-circumferenced is to take in past eternity and coming eternity.

Peter, being self-centered, was self-circumferenced, and being self-circumferenced lived in the dust of an hour, and saw only the pain of a process, and none of the glory of the ultimate issue. But these are antagonistic ideals, they are mutually destructive.

The things of God are a stumbling-block to the man who is minding the things of men. Christ placed before Peter the methods of His work, told him of the Cross, and it was a stumbling-block. That is what Paul said in writing to the Corinthians, “**The Cross . . . unto the Jews a stumbling-block.**” A man minding the things of men always finds the Cross a stumbling-block.

But it is equally true that the things of men are a stumbling-block to him who minds the things of God.

There is a very remarkable scene here. Peter took Him aside, just a little way from all the rest, and began to rebuke Him. We must not soften that word. Indeed, if we would have the real meaning of it, we must make it a little harsher. He chided Him, he was angry with Him. He said, What is coming to Your Kingdom if You die? How are You going to do the things You hope to do?

Then Jesus turned.

Probably He turned from him; He turned His back upon him, and His face to the other disciples; and said, **“Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense (stumbling-block) unto Me.”**

The man who loves Jesus, but who shuns God’s method, is a stumblingblock to Him.

A little while before Jesus had said, **“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.”** Now He said: “Thou art a *skandalon*, a rock of offence, a rock still, but a rock in the way; a rock lying across My pathway to hinder Me.”

He turned His back upon him because the **“must”** of eternity was upon His Spirit. Thus with sternness and severity He rebuked the man who, minding the things of men had ventured to rebuke Him, a Man Who was minding the things of God.

How often the very stones of Christ’s Church have become stones of stumbling in His way?

When does a man become a scandal to the Church?

- When he obtrudes his view of method as against God’s view of method;
- When he tries to build God’s Kingdom without God’s Cross, and without God’s suffering;
- When he ventures to say in answer to the **“must”** of God spoken from the lips of Jesus, Not that way, that is a mistake, but by some easier method; when he attempts to make the method of His victory easy.

Every suggestion of this age which leads us to imagine that we may bring His Kingdom in by softness and by sweetness, without blood and suffering, and agony, is a scandal, a stumbling-block.

In view of that mistake of Peter our Lord restated the terms of His discipleship: **“If any man will come after Me.”**

They all wanted to, they all loved Him, they all had affection for Him. He said, If this is so, if any man desires to come after me let him: First **“Deny himself;”** and secondly, **“Take up his Cross.”**

Let us consider those conditions carefully.

Denying of self is far more than self-denial in our usual sense of that term.

Perhaps we may best illustrate it by declaring that we have no right to make any sacrifice for Jesus Christ which He does not appoint. When a man takes on him some effort of sacrifice, simply because he thinks sacrifice is the right thing, and does not wait for orders, he is as surely a *skandalon* to his Lord as when he does not deny himself and take up his cross at the command of the Master.

The true disciple chooses neither song nor dirge, neither sunshine nor shadow; has no choice but to know his Master's will and to do it. If He appoint for us the blue waters of the lake and all the sunshine of the summer, then let us rejoice therein, and not vex our souls because we know no suffering and pain. If He appoint a *via dolorosa* and a sunless sky, then God make us willing to take the way, because the way is His appointment. We must be in His will if we are to cooperate with Him. The program of the disciple is expressed in these words, **"Follow Me."**

That is, make the **"must"** of My life the **"must"** of your life. I must. Does not that mean suffering? It may, or it may not. Suffering is not the deepest thing in the **"must."** The deepest thing is this; I must cooperate with the purpose of God, whatsoever it may be. I must co-operate with Him towards that resurrection that means ransom and redemption.

On the way there may be the suffering and the killing there surely will be some measure of it but the suffering and the killing are not the deepest things. The deepest thing is that we get into touch with God and do His will; and whether it be laughter or crying, sorrowing or sighing, the secret of life is to follow Him on the pathway of loyalty to the Divine will.

He explained this in gracious terms when He said:

"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."

This is the commonplace philosophy of true life. It is always so. Find any man who is always saving his life, and he will lose it.

- The way to lose our physical life is always to be saving it.
- The way to lose our mental life is to be careful that it never feels the storms and bruises of passion.
- The way to lose our spiritual life is to be so perpetually anxious to get into heaven that we never move into line with God in His work for the building of His Kingdom here on earth.

Then the King made His appeal in two questions: **"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man shall come in the glory."**

The Judge will be the Lord, Whose Cross you will not share to-day. To whom will you appeal from His verdict? The last throne is His throne, and at the final assize He presides.

If you save your life to-day, how will you buy it back, for the Man for Whom you will not suffer is the Man coming to reign in His glory?

The final appeal, therefore, is that we fall into line with His progress, and with the things of God; because He is also to come in the glory of His Father; and the glory of His Father is the outworking in history of the things of God upon which His heart and mind were set in the days of His flesh. And that means, first of all, a facing of the Cross.

The antagonism abides. We need not go far to find it; we can find it in our own heart.

- We hear in our own heart the searching and tremendous voice saying, “**I must.**”
- We hear also in our own heart something that says; Not that, let me escape that, let that be far from me.

To which are we going to yield?

Let us in imagination hurry back to the rocky places of Caesarea Philippi and ask ourselves, Which “**must**” shall master us? Are we going with Him in the will of God, enwrapped by the forces of eternity, to suffer and to triumph; or are we going to stand alone, saving our own miserable lives, and so lose them?

May God help us to decision.

~ end of chapter 48 ~

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