

**Exegetical Notes, Matthew 16:21-28**  
**“Anyone Who Would Come After Me”**

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**Matthew 16:21-28**

**Verse 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.*

- After Peter made the great confession (see verse 16) acknowledging that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus turned his attention away from the crowds and began to prepare his disciples for future events. Having presented the evidence that he was the Christ and having convinced his disciples that he was the Christ, he now proceeds to establish what that means.
- The Jews expected that the Messiah would come as a military hero to set them free from foreign rule. The concept of Messiah involving suffering, death, and resurrection would have been foreign to their understanding of the Messiah's role. Many scholars believe that this is why Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ (see verse 20). The people, wrongly understanding the role, would have tried to make him king or would have rejected him as Messiah.
- At this point the disciples, apparently, held many of the common misconceptions of the Jews related to the Messiah's function. Jesus began to instruct them about what would actually happen. They would go to Jerusalem where he would suffer and die and rise again.
- In Greek, the same word is translated “and” and “but.” Consequently, the last of this verse could read, “**BUT** on the third day be raised to life.” This would make a better and more dramatically correct reading of the line.

## Verse 22

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

- This was the reaction that Jesus expected from those who held the common misunderstanding of the Jews about the Messiah. The events Jesus knew were part of God’s plan to save the world were impossible. They could not happen. Peter’s emphatic reaction shows how firmly entrenched the common view was, and how deeply it was believed. Because Jesus was the Messiah, these things could **NEVER** happen to him.

## Verse 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.”*

- Hearing Peter’s remarks Jesus firmly rebuked him.
- Jesus called Peter Satan, or addressed Satan speaking through Peter. Though this is a troubling reality, Satan is able to speak through good people who are not on guard against him. He can use good people to accuse the elect of God. Therefore, we should always be on guard against such usage and always cautious against anyone, good or bad, who speaks outside of the authority of God’s word.
- Jesus understood what was happening because the words that Peter spoke were not part of the plan of God which Jesus fully understood. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:7-9) Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world, if he would just worship Satan and turn away from his God-appointed purpose. In this verse, that offer from Satan is being renewed. If Jesus will give up God’s plans, these things do not have to happen. Behind the words of Peter lurks the promise of Satan.
- Jesus’ response to Satan speaking through Peter is almost the same as his response to Satan in Matthew 4:10. He tells Satan to go away because he will not give up the plan of God for the plan of men or any other thing.
- In speaking harshly to Peter, Jesus is not angry with Peter. He is rebuking the evil spirit that is so bold as to speak to Jesus through the disciple.

### **Verse 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.***

- First and foremost, notice that this is what Jesus just did. He turned down Satan’s offer made through Peter. He denied some other plan that would have saved him suffering and death and denied himself by embracing his own cross of suffering and death. Jesus is not asking more than he gave.
- Second, notice that Jesus’ first instruction to his disciples about his role as Messiah is related to suffering and death, first his own and then theirs. Following Jesus is not about escaping the realities of sin. Because of sin, suffering and death are part of life even for those who follow Jesus.

### **Verse 25**

***“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.***

- This is a counter-cultural, irrational remark. Jesus twists the common thinking. Normally if you want to save your life and so proceed cautiously, you will save your life. And if you die for a cause, you are dead. You have lost your life regardless of what may have been the cause.
- Jesus acknowledges the simple truth. Even if you live cautiously and take no risks, you will die. It is inevitable. No matter how safe you play life, you will still die.
- And then he offers the impossible. He says that those who die in order to play their part with him in God’s plan will find the life they have lost.

### **Verse 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?”***

- Satan makes bold offers, promising all kinds of things to entice people away from God, just as he attempted to entice Jesus to abandon the plan of God. And Satan is able to deliver on the things he promises. And many have sold out to pursue that which Satan offers. But in the end, none of these things has any lasting value. All that Satan offers is temporary. A man sells his life and even his soul for these things, but they do not matter in the long-term measure of things.

### **Verse 27**

***“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.***

- This is the judgment spoken of in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. At this judgment, each person will be rewarded according to his works. This is not the judgment that determines salvation. That is an issue of grace received by faith. This judgment is of how we played our part in the plan of God.
- This verse and the passage in 1 Corinthians clearly establish that those who play their appointed role in the plan of God will be rightly rewarded in the kingdom of God.

### **Verse 28**

***“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”***

- See Matthew 17:1-13. Within six days Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in his kingdom.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Anyone Who Would Come After Me*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)