

Unit III. Opposition and Rejection of the King, ch 16-27

Lesson 15: Chapter 16 & 17 “Take up your cross and follow me”

Servant's preparation:

http://www.suscpts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew_16.pdf

http://www.suscpts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew_17.pdf

Brief introduction:

At the beginning of each lesson in the bible study of St. Matthew, please mention this book overview.

- ✓ Who is St. Matthew? He was one of the twelve disciples; he was a tax-collector before Jesus called him to follow Him.
- ✓ Who did he write his gospel to? The Jews, it is designed to prove that Jesus is the Messianic king of Old Testament (OT) prophecy.
- ✓ What is its theme? Jesus is the King of the Heavenly kingdom, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

Remember:

In Matthew 15, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and scribes about their traditions, arguing that they prioritize them over God's commandments. He then teaches that true defilement comes from the heart, not from what is eaten, and demonstrates His power through healing and miraculous feeding of a large crowd. Finally, He encounters a Canaanite woman whose powerful faith leads to the healing of her daughter.

Memory Verse:

16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Lesson Opener:

At a Christian bookstore, I found a huge assortment of jewelry with crosses. They had necklaces, rings, earrings, and bracelets just to name a few. Then I continued over to the clothing department. There I found a

lot of cool T-Shirts—many with crosses on them. Look at this cross necklace I am wearing, do you suppose that this was the kind of cross Jesus was talking about in today’s lesson?

If putting a cross on a necklace around your neck was what Jesus meant, then being His disciple would be pretty easy, wouldn't it? How about this T-Shirt? I can put on this shirt and wear it around so that everyone will know I am a follower of Jesus. Do you think that is what Jesus meant when He said anyone who wanted to be His disciple had to take up their cross and follow Him?

Lesson Goal:

Discipleship is costly and requires a willingness to sacrifice oneself for Christ. Jesus calls His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him, emphasizing the importance of losing one's life for His sake to find eternal life.

Lesson Body:

Chapter 16:

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)

What does Jesus mean by His answer to the Pharisees and Sadducees?

He tells them that they apparently know how to read the signs of the weather but cannot read "signs of the times " meaning they cannot or will not interpret His miracles as signs of His authority and the beginning of the Messianic Age as predicted in the writings of the prophets.

What may have stimulated Jesus to talk about the “leaven” of the Pharisees? What do you think He was referring to? What does leaven generally represent in the Bible?[sin] In this case is it good or bad? How do you know?

Jesus often used situations they were facing to teach them something. In this case it appears that the discussion of bread prompted Jesus to give an illustration about the leaven of the Pharisees. Originally, the disciples didn't understand this statement. They thought it had something to do with the fact that they forgot to take the bread. But Jesus didn't care they forgot to take the bread. He had just done two miracles feeding more than nine thousand people anyway. The issue seems to be that they were still thinking in the physical plane rather than the spiritual plane. Jesus had already done many miracles and taught them many lessons. Yet many times, they still didn't “get it.” When Jesus used examples or parables they were often stuck and couldn't figure out the meaning of what He taught them. Jesus wanted them to move past the basics and start to grasp what He was teaching them.

Jesus used questions to lead them to understanding. He showed them how to use their minds to find the answer, which they would be able to do every time in the future. This is like the Chinese idiom, “Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Jesus is still focused on His recent confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees and uses leaven as a symbol of their false interpretation of the Law and their evil influence that spreads like an infection in the same way yeast expands a dough.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)

He asked His disciples this question in verse 15, not because He was ignorant what the people thought and spoke of Him; but to give them the opportunity to express their faith and to confirm and strengthen them in it.

Peter speaks up. He is bold and outspoken. There are good sides to his outspoken nature, and there are also weak sides. We see both in this chapter (later we will see him rebuke Jesus.)

There was a wide range of opinions on who Jesus was. But all the opinions had one thing in common. Everyone believed Jesus was somebody special and not just an ordinary man.

With spontaneity, St. Peter replied at once and expressed the faith of all the apostles in verse 16. What is unable to be declared by flesh and blood, is declared by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Simon Peter accepted a new name which means he has accepted a declaration from the Holy Spirit. The name 'Barjonah' in our tongue means 'son of the dove' [Holy Spirit], or "Son of John" which means the grace of God.

18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

The word 'Peter' is derived from the Greek 'Petra' which is 'the rock.' The Lord has established His church, which is His kingdom, on the rock, the faith in Christ that is declared to St. Peter.

"By saying so, He meant, 'on this faith, and on this confession, I built my church. He showed by this that many others believe in what St. Peter believed in". St. John Chrysostom.

"19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Son of David Himself is He who opens and no one else shuts, He also shuts, and no one opens. If the Lord has granted His church this Godly key, this is because He entrusts the church with it. It is He who works secretly inside it. He knows who is worthy, and He opens to him through it, and he who is left outside, is shut out.

Coptic church faith:

All the apostles, and their successors, partake also of this power of binding and loosing. This authority works by means of the Holy Spirit that dwells in it and in them. This authority will be repeated to the apostles again after Resurrection when He breaths the Holy Spirit on them.

The power of binding is exercised,

- 1st by refusing to absolve.
- 2nd by enjoining penance for sins forgiven.
- 3rd by ,excommunication, suspension or prohibition.
- 4th by making rules and laws for the government of the Church
- 5th by determining what is of faith by the judgments and definitions of the church.

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:21-28)

Jesus treated His disciples like friends. He told them ahead of time what was going to happen even though He knew they wouldn't fully understand it until after the fact. But then after it happened, they would remember what He said, and it would increase their faith. The details He shared were very

accurate. It included His suffering, death, and resurrection and the ones who would do it against Him. In sharing this secret with the disciples, Jesus is correcting the common misperception that the Messiah is coming in triumph to re-establish the kingdom of David.

Verse 22 – Here we see again Peter’s outspoken personality which sometimes gets him into trouble. Peter’s mistake is related to his success. He had previously answered Jesus well. Jesus gave him a positive response. He was the only one who spoke up, and he got the right answer. However, in this verse, Peter rebukes Christ.

Jesus responded to Peter very harshly/strongly. Peter is obviously not literally Satan. But, -in this specific case, Peter was being used by Satan to tempt Jesus and try to pull Him off track of the Salvation plan.

Verse 24-28: Perhaps the crowd thought that following Jesus meant witnessing lots of miracles and receiving lots of benefits. Jesus is going to show them that there is more to it than just making a wish or thinking it would be good to follow Jesus. It requires real commitment and sacrifice. This is a key part of being a disciple. It requires sacrifice. It requires submitting ourselves, our goals, our desires, and our plans to Christ.

There will be some things that we want to do, which Christ will say “No, you cannot.” What Jesus is saying is that “To follow Me, you have to be prepared even to die.” We know that all the disciples except for John did indeed give their lives for Jesus. Many martyrs did as well, and more are added to the list every day.



Verse 25 shows that there is a certain irony in following Christ. You must give up something in order to get it. [see the takeaway].

Verse 28: The Lord wished to take His disciples to this kingdom in a tangible way; He allowed three of His disciples to witness and be blessed with His transfiguration, to experience some moments of eternal heavenly life.

Chapter 17:

The Transfiguration on the Mount (17:1-13)

The disciples and Apostles must have been frightened and discouraged after Jesus' prediction of His death. Jesus took these three Apostles, Peter, John and James to let them witness a manifestation of His glory that confirms He is the Son of God and that He will come in glory when all has been fulfilled.

A divine glory from His deity showed itself in a visible manner through His flesh. The Old Covenant Church was represented by Moses and Elijah who embodied the law and the prophets of the old Israel, and the New Covenant was represented by Peter, James and John who embodied the new Israel, the Church of the people of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The cloud that covered them refers to God's presence. St. Peter the apostle asked to build three tabernacles, and he did not realize the need was for one cloud only, because Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) are hidden in the Holy Bible. Who is Elijah other John the Baptist; for (Matt 17:13) "Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist." John came in the spirit of Elijah.

A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)

Why couldn't the disciples cast out the demon?

The 'lack of faith' is the obstacle that has deprived even the disciples from the ability of casting out the devil. This is why the Lord advised them to fast and pray to support them in casting the devil out, through their faith.

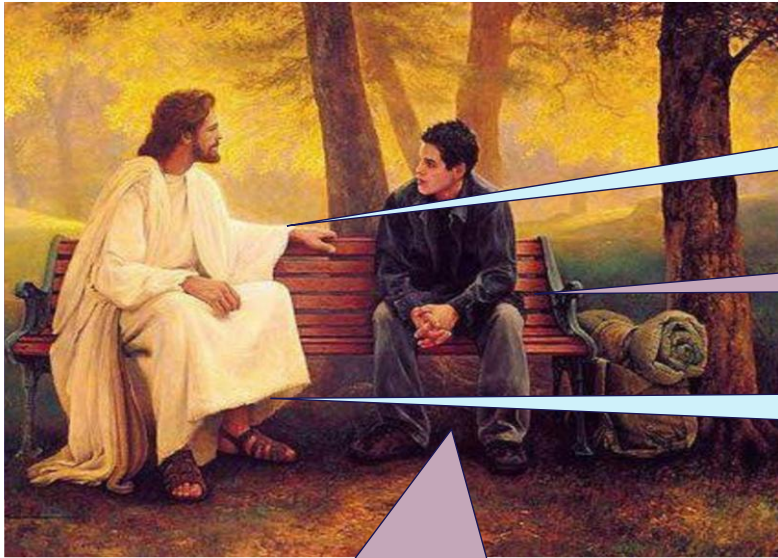
Faith can begin small and if nourished by the grace of God can grow to become powerful enough to "move a mountain." Not only demons, but envy, pride, greed, materialism, a revengeful spirit, etc. Can't be also cast out by prayer and fasting.

Takeaway and lesson delivery ideas:

Take your cross and follow me:

How do I deny myself and carry my cross?

1. Grow in faith [it is a cross we carry to believe in what we do not see and touch]
2. Deny your desires that are contrary to God's commandments. [my body is telling me certain things that God says no, so it is a cross that we struggle with our body]
3. Deny your pride [how easy is it to be proud of our achievements and get praises]
4. Deny your appetite [the church says fast while I want to eat and enjoy all the food, I like. It is a cross]
5. Deny your control of your life. [Who is determining your path? If it is God, then you are denying yourself to let Him guide] People are rejecting even their gender because they want to be in control.
6. Seek sanctifications [Living in purity while my body desires otherwise, this is a cross].
7. Persevering to the end. [not only do I follow God for a day or a week but for the rest of my life, isn't that a cross? No break from holiness.
8. Sacrifice relationships [Some friends are feeding our minds with their wrong behavior; you are absorbing from them even if you think you aren't, carry your cross and keep away from them]
9. Sacrifice bad habits.
10. Do not spoil your body [rest is not sin but failure to carry out responsibilities is laziness].



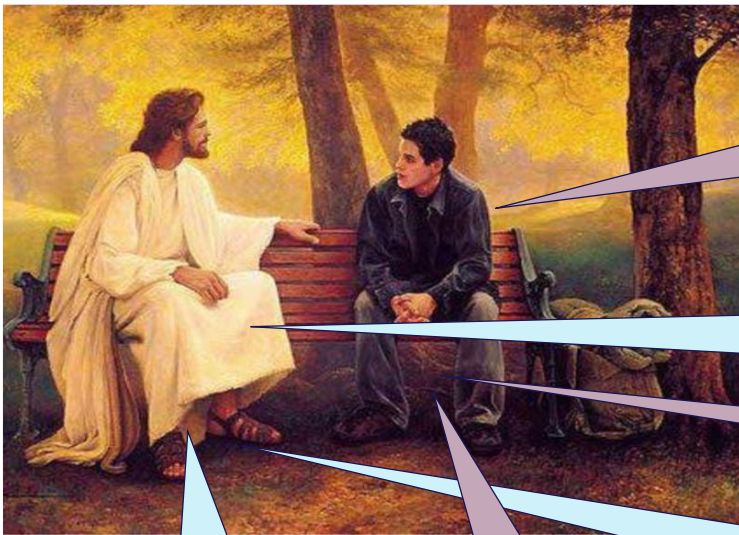
You love me, right? Do you want to be my disciple?

Of course, Jesus, you know I love You with all my heart, but I do not know how to show you my love

I will show you how, I have the perfect formula for you, go pick up your cross and follow me.

But that is the last thing I wanted to hear, why do You want me to live a miserable life carrying a cross every day? That is not what society is telling me. Everyone around me keeps saying:

- ✓ Do whatever makes you happy
- ✓ Live your life
- ✓ It's all about you.
- ✓ You only get to live once and so make sure you enjoy it!
- ✓ It is a God-given right to pursue your own interest because that is what will make you happy.



Jesus, I know what makes me happy all the time, I like to have many friends and feel popular, I like to dress and look the best, I like to watch funny things on my phone resting on the couch all day, I like to be rich, I like a highly-paying job, I ...

Hold on! I know you more than you know yourself, I am telling you, if you get all these, you won't be happy. If you pursue selfish desires, you will never get filled but might be destroyed on earth and then lose eternal life, is that what you want?

No, but living in self-denial sounds awful too, why would I be happy if I put God and people before myself?

No, but when your will does not line up with mine, you would do what pleases you and disobey me.

Is every desire evil?

²⁴ "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it". Luke 9:24. You are running around everyday to fill your needs, and everything is about you but at the end you remain empty and sad.