



## **Matthew 16:21–23**

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, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

## **Reflection**

Have you ever considered what it might be like to live on the brink of revolution? You’ve lived in occupied lands all your life, paying heavy taxes to fund the armies of your oppressors. There have been uprisings before which have been savagely punished, the bodies of these heroes crucified and lining the highways as a deterrent. But this time is different. God is with us. He’s promised for centuries that one day he would send a conquering king, a Messiah, who would take back his Holy Land forever. That day is finally here.

The man standing before you is not just a prophet, as the crowds are calling him. By his own admission he is God's anointed king, the Messiah. And he's just honoured Peter, the leader of the disciples, with the promise that he will use him to build a church, a great assembly of God's people, a holy nation so indestructible that even the gates of hell will not be able to overcome it.

You can only imagine what is going through the disciple's minds as they witness this momentous turning point in history. Surely their next move must be to sit down and plan their strategy. If Jesus is the king, and he's about to build an indestructible kingdom, then the next step must surely be to figure out how to get rid of the pres-

ent kings and priests who are ruling Israel. The obvious solution must be to march on Jerusalem, pick up supporters on the way, like those 5,000 men Jesus just fed and who'd then tried to make him king by force. There's an army right there. Then we'll take back the Temple in Jerusalem and the city itself and that's how God's kingdom will come.

With thoughts like these running through the minds of the disciples you can imagine their collective shock and disbelief when Jesus, in verse 21,

... began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he

must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

‘Yes,’ says the Messiah, ‘we’re marching on Jerusalem, but I’m going there to suffer and die and on the third day be raised to life.’

Only it seems that none of the disciples even heard that last part about being raised to life because Peter immediately takes Jesus aside, and does the unthinkable in Jewish master-and-disciple relationships. He rebukes Jesus. They say pride comes before a fall and perhaps it was that. Certainly on the surface nothing could be more arrogant than rebuking your master, let alone the Messiah. But we can also hear the passion in Peter’s voice. Peter loves Jesus and this is unthinkable.

Peter loves Jesus, but Peter's dreams are also being dashed.

“Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

‘No, this isn't how it's meant to be. You're the Messiah, this can never be!’ In responding this way Peter is showing us just how little the disciples understood in terms of the type of Messiah that Jesus was going to be. Jesus has alluded to his death in the past. He's spoken about the bridegroom being taken from them (9:15), the Son of Man being like Jonah three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (12:40), and the need to take up their cross and follow him (10:38). But today Jesus speaks plainly and in great detail about his coming death. This is the first of four

specific predictions about his death, but more than that, as the first four words of today's passage indicate, 'from that time on' Jesus would repeatedly speak about his coming death. Why? Because it was so unthinkable. He's the Messiah, he's not meant to die. So unthinkable, that even when the moment came Jesus' disciples were still reeling in disbelief at what was unfolding before their eyes.

They'd thought they were going to remember this moment for the rest of their lives and they were right; but for all the wrong reasons. And they did. Our passage proves it. This shocking moment was so burned into Matthew's mind that he wrote 'Jesus turned and said to Peter'. Such an incidental detail, 'Jesus turned', but such strong historical proof that an eyewitness

wrote these words. Matthew remembers this moment like it was yesterday, so clearly that he can in passing recall that Jesus turned around before he spoke. Historians love incidental details like this as they are amongst the strongest proofs of authenticity. Matthew continues,

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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

It’s hard to imagine a greater or swifter fall from grace than this. A moment ago Peter was the rock on which Jesus will build his church, now he’s another type of rock, a stumbling block. But far worse than that, Jesus rebukes Peter with exactly the same



words as he did back in Matthew chapter 4 when Satan was tempting him in the wilderness. Looking straight at Peter he says 'Away from me Satan!' or 'Get behind me, Satan!' as the same words are translated here. Back in Matthew Chapter 4 Satan's strongest temptation when he was testing Jesus in the wilderness was to offer Jesus kingship without suffering, and even though Peter doesn't realise it, that is exactly what he is doing here. Unwittingly, he's siding with Satan, and as one commentator reflected 'None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character.'

How must Jesus' words have stung! But also consider how hard it must have been for Jesus to resist this temptation coming

from such an unexpected quarter, one of his closest friends. Satan is like that. But it wasn't as if Peter had been taken over by Satan, he'd simply let *his plans* for Jesus get in the way of *God's plans* for Jesus. His plans for Jesus were for him to go and defeat Caesar on behalf of the whole Jewish nation. But God's plans for Jesus were for him to go and defeat death on behalf of the whole world.

## **Think & Pray**

This is a remarkable passage of Scripture that is well worth the time thinking over again for yourself right now. We've learnt this morning that Christianity without the cross is worthless. How much do you think about sin and its effects in our culture, and this world's desperate need of the cross

of Christ? We've also seen that the most formidable instruments of temptation can be well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character. Are there well-meaning people in your life who are leading you away from Jesus? Perhaps they're even Christian friends. Few people were closer to Jesus than Peter and yet look how Jesus speaks to Peter in our passage today – out of love and for his good, and for the good of those around him. Perhaps someone has spoken to you sharply like this recently. You might still be smarting, but could they have been right?

Another question that today's passage asks of us is this: What will you do one day when like Peter your carefully laid plans for your life come in direct conflict with God's plans for your life? Perhaps that

day is now? What then is God saying to you this morning through his word? Finally you might consider how pride so often comes before a fall. How even the leader of the disciples, the very rock on which Jesus chose to build his church, only a moment after being so honoured by Jesus, could then sin so grievously and be spoken to by Jesus as if he were Satan. In a moment. If it can happen to Peter, it could well happen to us, even today.

Pray that it doesn't. Pray that Jesus would keep you safe today from sin and temptation. And open up and share with him whatever God has put on your heart as you've considered his word this morning.