

## **Who Is Following Whom? *Matthew 16:21-28***

Matthew 16 marks a turning point in the Gospel. Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah, but a new question immediately emerges: *What sort of Messiah is he?*

Jesus teaches that he must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day. Peter objects. This cannot be right. This isn't what the Messiah looks like.

Let's stop right here and look at this. How often do we do the exact same thing?! How often do we decide what Jesus is like, what his politics are, and what he stands for—rejecting any revelation of him that doesn't fit our mould?

Whenever Jesus thinks exactly like you do, become suspicious. If your version of Jesus always agrees with your politics, assumptions, and priorities, chances are you haven't surrendered to a Saviour - you've turned him into a mascot for your own agenda. At that point, the core question becomes: **Who is following whom?**

Look at Peter. His mistake is not that he rejects Jesus; it is that he tries to *correct* him. Jesus rebukes him directly: *"Get behind me, Satan."* Peter has the right Messiah, but the wrong vision of Messiahship. He wants glory without suffering, victory without the cross.

Jesus tells him, *"You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

The real Jesus continually disrupts our expectations. Discipleship begins when we stop trying to remake Jesus in our image and allow him to remake us in his.

Jesus then lays down the condition: *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

Notice the order: Jesus leads. We follow.

The cross is not an abstract symbol of generic hardship. Not every bad choice or bad day is discipleship. A cross is only a cross when it arises from active faithfulness to Christ. What does that look like?

The theologian Jürgen Moltmam reminds us that to follow the crucified God is to participate in God's costly love **for others**. Sometimes that means offering forgiveness when resentment is easier. Sometimes it means radical generosity when self-protection feels safer.

The question is never, *"How much am I suffering?"*

The question is: **"Am I following Jesus?"**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed for resisting Hitler's regime, famously wrote: *"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."*

Bonhoeffer didn't mean we should seek out suffering. He meant that something in us must die if we are truly to follow Jesus: Our need to be right. Our need to be in control. Our attachment to status, comfort, and self-

interest. The old self dies so that a new self, shaped by Christ, can emerge.

So, if the cross you are carrying doesn't do that... if you are not being reshaped by the gospel... If you are carrying self-imposed martyrdom, let me offer you the exact advice a very close of friend offered me recently – these were not her own words, by the way, she was quoting from our very loved and already missed Dolly Parton, she told me: *"Get off the cross, honey, somebody needs the wood."*

Because the cross isn't the end of the story, is it?

Immediately after speaking of the cross, Jesus speaks of glory - promising that the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father. Drawing from Daniel's vision of the heavenly court (Daniel 7:9-10), Jesus makes it clear: he is the Son of Man who suffers but who ultimately is the one who reigns. He carries the cross so that he may sit on the throne.

In conclusion, what lessons did we learn from this passage today?

1. Peter learned he could not tell Jesus what kind of Messiah to be (...and neither can we).
2. The disciples learned they could not follow Jesus without surrendering themselves (...and neither can we).

3. And we all learned that the crucified Christ is also the victorious King. Let's not making him into warrior Messiah, for our own comfort.

What do you need to take away and ponder? In your life, who is following whom?

- If Jesus simply echoes your opinions, you are probably leading.
- If your discipleship never costs you anything, you are probably leading.
- But if you are being challenged, changed, and called beyond where you would choose to go on your own, then you are probably doing what Jesus asks:

Getting behind him. And following.

Amen.