
Spiritual Formation Part 35

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Matthew 16: 21-28

Spiritual Formation is about Following Christ! Part 2

Take up the cross is carrying the crossbeam to the crucifixion. Jesus was warning us of what is in store for those who are serious and real with the faith. Crucifixion was the most heinous form of execution ever devised in terms of pain and the terror it caused. It is not the entire cross that weighs hundreds of pounds. It is the horizontal portion; the pike portion was usually permanently placed. It literally means a condemned criminal or person carrying their own crossbeam to be used in their execution while the spectators would cry out insults. This is symbolic, and refers to our enduring mockery and scorn for being obedient.

- *What profit.* We tend to see life in terms of the power and possessions we have, but God sees the value of life in spiritual growth that leads to the character and relationships we form. There is no real profit in money and treasures—only in who we are in Christ. Jesus plays on the words to say, *how can you play with your stuff if you are not alive* (Psalm 49:7-9; 15).
- *Reward each.* Here is another proclamation to judgment. Jesus is the Judge who will evaluate us, whether we are saved or not, and reward us for how we serve and represent Him (Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 18:30). This passage quotes Daniel 7:13-14 and Zechariah 14:5.
- *Taste death.* This phrase is colloquial to say “die.” Some have said this means Jesus was to come back in the Disciples lifetime, but this is not the real meaning; others said it can mean the Transfiguration in the next passage which is a part of it (Matt. 17:1-13).
- *Coming ties with death,* and means a process. This means the events of the Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and the role of the Holy Spirit, which all the Disciples experienced—except Judas. Jesus was to endure the Passion to usher in the Kingdom and proclaim His dominion.

The process of *tasting death* applies to us, that our lives are a process. The Spirit of God is living in us! God’s mission is to transform our hearts so we can live in the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom with His values and purpose, regardless of any opposition we might have or the opposition others give us. Usually, it is our own opposition that hinders us the greatest!

The ultimate battle in life is not with arms, it is with wills. This passage is not about choosing suffering; it is about following God’s will regardless of suffering. This

means we surrender our will to His. This means we are focused upon building our lives on His precepts, not ours. The only way to be a real, authentic follower of our Lord Jesus Christ is to deny what we want and pursue what He wants (John 3:29-30; Gal. 5:24). This means that who we are and how we are, to God and others around us, is essential. We must never be the stumbling stone, trying to muddle with God's plans for ourselves or others. We must conduct ourselves with utmost integrity (Psalm 15) that points to His example. Jesus does not force us to submit and surrender; He models it for us to follow.

Our faith cannot just be academic, an idea, or even just a hope; it has to be real. We must have more in our spiritual arsenal than just belief. We must have more in order to grow in Him and make our faith and relationships work. So allow Him to carry you over that barrier so you can be His instrument to yourself and others!

God is much more concerned with our spiritual growth—maturity that develops our character, and relationships that glorify and make Him known—than anything else. Our focus tends to be comfort; we strive to seek personal betterment through careers and money, manipulation and greed. His focus is on how to sanctify and perfect us, not to please and pamper us! This is not about bearing a burden or rallying to a cause, but identifying with Christ as our Lord.

Questions:

1. If you could *gain the whole world*, that is, have anything you want, what would that be? What would this do to your personal life, spiritual growth, and relationships?
2. Why do you suppose Peter, who had just boldly proclaimed his faith, quickly forgot it? Have you done this? If so, how, and why?
3. What would cause Peter to think he needed to protect Jesus?
4. Why was Jesus' goal of martyrdom necessary to pay our dept of sin (Matthew 20:28)? What other passages can you think of to support this fact?
5. Peter tried to superimpose His plan upon our Lord's. How and why do you, or people you have come in contact with, do so?
6. Peter publicly criticized his Teacher—a cultural “no-no.” Why would he do this? If you had been there, what would you have done?
7. Throughout Scripture, Jesus uses humorous witticisms and puns; in the Greek, Jesus is, at times, literally doing “stand up comedy.” How does this affect your image of Christ?
8. What do you need to do to overcome setbacks? How does more effort, right thinking, clear goals, and help from others help you do so?

9. What needs to happen to develop trust and break down those barriers so you can grow deeper in Him?
10. What does the committed Christian need to do to remain on His Rock, our foundation?
11. What do we need to do so we do not become stumbling stones?
12. We tend to see life in terms of the power and possessions we have, but God sees the value of life in spiritual growth that leads to the character and relationships we form. How do you struggle in this area? What would it take to succeed in God's ways more, instead of the world's?

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