

Matthew 21-05-30a

As we continue now in our service this morning, let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study. This is the 30th day of May, 2021. We are continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 17.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, what a blessing it is to live in a land that despite recent efforts and machinations grants us freedom to assemble, freedom to worship, freedom to study your word and to apply it in our daily lives, looking unto the Lord Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. The example of his hope, the joy that was set before him, motivating him to fulfill your plan perfectly and now seated at your right hand and granting us the privilege by grace and by his efficacious work on the cross to represent him on this earth.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will reveal its content to our souls, to our innermost being, help us to truly understand it and to be motivated as the Lord Jesus was in this life to live it and to invest it and to accomplish it in your power and for your glory. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. We are at a wonderful portion of the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ here in Matthew chapter 17.

Just glance up the page. I'm not going to do an extensive review, but you remember that we have Peter's great confession. You are the Christ.

And Jesus says that those who truly come to appreciate this like Peter, that is the rock on which he is going to build his assembly. The assembled people built on the rock of the Lord Jesus Christ are going to come to that true appreciation of who Jesus is, what he represents, what he does and his central place in the father's plan for the human race. And he says, for you personally, you are going to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

And keys, it's interesting to think back, what kind of locks and keys did they really have back in those ancient days? Mechanical locks are a relatively recent invention. So how did, you know, did they make them out of rocks? Did they assemble them out of brass parts? But there were means of securing chains in those days, just as in the days of old, when Samson was chained to the mill and was grinding in his blindness and is then chained in the Philistine temple. So the ability to secure a thing has existed for a long time but these keys are associated with authority, judgmental authority, the ability to bind and loose, to allow and to forbid.

And specifically, this is a promise to Peter and those like him who are going to sit judging the 12 tribes of Israel in the literal millennial kingdom. And it is that, pardon me, it is that millennial kingdom that is going to be woven as a thread and as a theme through this section of Matthew. So then Jesus commanded his disciples that they should tell no one

that he is Jesus the Christ, something Peter has just affirmed.

Who do men say that I am? They think you're John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Jesus says, don't try to disabuse them of that belief. He specifically says it.

And as you look at this, you can see a bit of a chiastic structure here. Who do men say that I am? He commanded them that they should tell no one who he really is. If they, let him who is misguided be misguided still.

And then who do you say that I am? You are the Christ. Well, because you know who I am, you're going to be given keys and authority to judge in the kingdom. So there's a symmetry here, followed by Jesus predicting his death and resurrection, which Peter doesn't want to hear and tries to, instead of trying to convince people that Jesus is the Christ when they don't believe that, he now tries to convince Jesus that he's not the Christ and doesn't need to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die.

And Jesus says, that is satanic thinking. You've got your mind on the things of men and not on the things of God. This is critically important to our passage this morning.

So then Jesus says, you've got to get your mind right if you're going to be my disciple. If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. And you can see the addition here of, and the movement from looking at Jesus and who he is and that he must, the first understanding is he must go to Jerusalem.

He must take up his cross and fulfill the will of the father. It's great that you know that Jesus is the Christ and that that's what he's going to do. And you shouldn't forget it like Peter did in the same context.

But then if we are going to be followers of Christ, we have to realize that we do the same thing. And it is critically important that there be this attitude of self-denial and commitment to following. And so Jesus gives these aorist tense concepts of denying self and taking up the cross.

And then the present tense concept of following. And this is suggestive, as I mentioned last time, because the things that come in the aorist generally precede what happens in the present, especially the aorist participle. And these are not aorist participles, but the idea is you do these things first and then you can do the present tense.

So if, and it's great because this is the how to, this is what we're always looking for in scripture, right? How do I do this? You paint me this wonderful picture of glory and saints and sitting with Christ and overcomer promises. How? How do I do this? Give me something practical. Give me an instruction sheet.

I always like it when you buy a thing that has to be put together. And it's got an owner's manual and a big book and it's got extensive instructions, but they give you this quick

guide. And it's just a couple of pages, maybe front and back.

And usually the back is Spanish. And so on one side, it just says, look, do this. This is what you do to get this thing up and running.

Plug in the cord, hit the power button, then plug in the USB cord, wait for your computer to give you this message, say, okay, now you can use it. Something like that. This is that.

Let me just ask you a question this morning. And it's the question that is asked in a hymn title that is apropos for our day. Am I a soldier of the cross? Am I a soldier of the cross? Do I want to be a true and faithful follower of Jesus Christ? Just answer that question in your own mind.

If you don't, be honest. If you do, then you're going to be interested in understanding what is said here. Because Jesus says, if you desire to come after me, if you desire to follow me, if you desire to be a good soldier of the cross, this is what you do.

And this is the order in which you do it. Follow me is last and it's present tense, but there are two aorist things. These are decision points.

These are checkpoints. These are gateways, doorways into the following that's at the end of this verse. And the first one is deny himself, let him deny himself.

This is a conscious reallocating of priorities. And it's a good thing to check and to do and to affirm at the beginning of a day. Because we wake up, we're doing our morning ablutions, we're getting ready for checking off all of the requirements and opportunities of the day.

And it's a great time to assess who am I living this day for? Have I got a task list that is built around my agenda or am I going to deny myself and look out not only for my own interests, which is legitimate, we need to dress ourselves, clothe ourselves, feed ourselves, organize ourselves, supply ourselves, not be a burden to others to the extent that we can avoid it. But the first checkpoint when we're assessing the upcoming day, this is my suggestion, is this going to be a day of self-denial or is this going to be a day of self-gratification? It is one or the other and nothing else. I'm either going to satisfy myself, I'm going to feel better by some form of gratification or I'm going to take out my frustrations, I'm going to make others feel my presence in a positive or a negative sense.

If we are going to follow Jesus Christ, the first thing to do before a task, before a day, before a visit, before a conversation, before whatever it is we are about to do is this self-gratification or is this self-abnegation? Am I going to take myself out of the picture? I'm going to look out for the interests of others. This is the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Philippians chapter two, we've memorized that as a church.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Didn't think all of his things were

something to be held onto, denied himself and took up his cross. Right? This is an heiress, this is a point of decision, a point of commitment, a point of policy.

It's the gateway to being a good follower, a good soldier of Christ. Very first thing, and it's not easy to remember, but look, it's easy to remember things when you want something, when you need something to arrive by a certain date because it's a present and you want to give it to someone, you make sure you get it ordered, you make sure you check the shipping and get it shipped in time. When you want to prepare a special meal or you want to do something, you don't have any trouble remembering the preparatory steps.

You get it done well in advance. I'm going to take a trip. I'm going to fill up my car the day before.

I'm going to check the tires. So the extent to which we do this first step is the extent to which we actually want to be a follower. If we don't bother to check on whether this is self-gratification or self-denial, we don't really want, and we're just fooling ourselves to say we do.

If we want to be a good follower, we'll say, you know what? Not my will, but thy will be done, just like the Lord Jesus did. And we will have that mind and we start with that mind. We prepare with that mind.

Do you remember back in Daniel when we were studying and there's a whole chapter on his preparation to approach the throne of God and request based on scripture, based on the 70 years that Jeremiah had foretold that it was time to confess and time to commit and time to prepare to return to the land, rebuild the temple of God, which we're now studying in Haggai and Zechariah and seeing the dismal failure. Why is it that those people in that day weren't getting God's temple built, failed at this step? I got to make sure my house has got its paneling. And this is not the time to be worrying about God's house.

This is the time to make sure my house is finished and God condemns them for it and challenges them over it and sends two great prophets to light a fire under them and get their mind right. And that effort does not succeed. They are not moved.

They're not motivated. It's like the reforms and the revivals in the days of Josiah and Hezekiah, flash in the pan, celebration, beat a tambourine, offer a sacrifice, and it falls flat. Fails at this step.

You and I are going to fail to be good followers of Jesus Christ if we do not succeed in this first step. Look at it harshly, look at it clearly and say, look, I can't live a life of self-gratification or forget the rest. That's number one.

That's the first heiress. The second one is take up his cross. As I mentioned, this is a little

startling since they have no notion at this point, although Jesus has told them that he is going to be crucified as a form of execution.

They know about it. They know what it means. They've seen guys drag their cross through the streets as the Romans are going to try to make Jesus do.

And so when he says commit to self-denial and take up your cross, take up is an heiress, it's a decision point. This is recognizing the assigned burden. This is not a joyous burden.

This is not, he's not heavy. He's my brother. This is a cross.

It is a cross to bear. It is something that requires spiritual intestinal fortitude to shoulder. Take up the assigned burden.

Do you think that Jesus enjoyed going to the cross? He did not. Where was the joy in the cross that Jesus bore? I just quoted it for you. For the joy that was set before him, there is joy afterward, eternal joy, lasting joy, eternal life benefit, shouldering the momentary light afflictions that are assigned to us.

It's interesting when you look at Simon of Cyrene bearing Jesus' cross, and it's a fascinating study, but there is no notion here of taking up someone else's cross. Take up his cross, Jesus says, and each one is different. All of us have a unique place, but it's heiress.

This happens first. So if you want a quick spiritual gut check, if you want a little three-step card to stick on the mirror in the morning, self-denial or self-gratification, cross or crown? Am I just going to grab straight for the crown and try to skip the cross? And number three is the present tense, keep on following. This is the durative idea.

These others are condensed, they're solidified. They are suggested as a preliminary step, and they're pretty quick steps. Okay, I'm not going to try to live for the joy of the moment today.

I'm going to commit to setting aside what I think would be a great plan of Sam here, where instead of trying to take up the joy and live for the gratification of the moment, where is the burden I have been assigned today? What cross should I take up? The cross is the symbol of self-sacrifice. What is the definition of love, our working definition? Beneficial toward others, sacrificial toward self. You can see it reflected here.

Jesus is talking about true love, love for God and love for one another right here. Deny self, take up the cross. Who assigned Jesus his cross? God the Father assigned that specific burden to the Lord Jesus.

So where are we going to look for our assigned burden, our assigned opportunity for sacrificial, beneficial effort and activity? And it's an effort. You don't will a cross to move.

You pick it up and carry it.

It's grinding. It was so difficult that Jesus could not make it all the way to Golgotha with his cross. That's how hard this thing can be.

But it's assigned by God. And this helps us get our mind right. We've been saying the whole problem with the people in Haggai's day is they couldn't get their mind right.

Their hearts weren't in the work. And they found wonderfully convincing and compelling reasons why they couldn't finish the temple. And it wasn't the right time.

We can do the same thing. Got to get our mind right. And this is how you do it.

Look for the opportunity before something to dedicate to self-denial, to dedicate to bearing the divinely assigned burden. We don't necessarily have to bear a burden that somebody else puts on us. There's another place in scripture that says, each one must shoulder his own load.

Right after it says bearing one another's burdens. But this burden is personal, his cross. And then following, following through, completing the journey, following.

Present tense, durative, ongoing action. This is what the day then consists of. This is what the task turns out to be, following.

And of course the destination is the same as the Lord Jesus. And if we do these things, we will end up where he is. If anyone desires to come after me, do you want to sit with me on my throne? Do you want to walk with me in white? Do you want to share meals of hidden manna? All of those wonderful overcomer blessings require the presence of Christ.

If anyone wants to arrive where he arrives, this is how you do it. Now, this is critically important. I'm going to skip the rest of this until you get to the end, 28.

There are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. That is the destination. If anyone desires to see me and be with me in my kingdom and experience that glory, we have just reviewed what Jesus says, this is how to do it.

This is how it works. And when you read those intervening three verses, you find out what the alternative is. If you try to save your life, you're just going to lose it.

If you live the life of self-gratification, you're never going to be gratified. If you live the life of burden avoidance, you're going to be crushed under burdens. The opposite of human expectation is what happens.

The son of man will come in the glory of his father with his angels, verse 27. Then he will

reward each according to his works. Reward according to works.

This is not a salvation formula. This is what is the fruit of your life? What is the outcome of your time on this earth? Everybody has been to funerals and you hear memorials and requiems and the obituaries and the summaries of life. That's not the summary.

That's just the momentary incomplete observations that people have had. The real summation comes at the judgment. And then reward will be assigned based on what we do.

It is not enough to really, really, really, really have faith, it's the book of James. Does it come out in what we do? Do we deny ourselves? Do we take up our cross? And are we followers in that ongoing sense? Now, chapter 17, after six days. Can I tell you how important each and every one of the words of scripture in general and in this section in particular is.

After six days, Jesus took Peter, James and John, his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves and he was transfigured before them. Not only rabbinic tradition, not only the pattern of the Passover lamb, but this passage suggests that at least in the metaphorical sense, in the way time is organized, there are six days of human history and the seventh day is the millennial kingdom. Literal 1000 year reign of Christ and the Davidic Kings on this earth.

After six days. Do you need after six days? Couldn't we just have the word then? Couldn't we just have after these things? Couldn't we have any one of a number of segues that you find throughout scripture? What do you make of after six days? If not, this is a clue. There's no other reason for it to be there than to tell us something, right? Everything in scripture is there to tell us something.

So what is it telling us? After six days, after the initial revelation that salvation is coming, that there is an answer to the problem of sin that was suggested in Genesis chapter three, the seed of the woman, the curse being driven from the garden, the kingdom is a large reversal of the curse, right? It's like Stephen Stills and Nash and Young and those guys used to sing that, I think it's a Joni Mitchell song, we've got to get back to the garden. Well, there is only one way to get back to the garden and it's not sticking daisies in M16 muzzles. It's not singing songs and being anti-war and having a lot of human crusading and attempts at reform or any of the things that you see going around today.

Do you see anything happening in our culture, in our world today, that's going to bring back God's garden of Eden, that is going to eliminate the corruption that forced man to leave the garden. Man is not qualified to go back to the garden. If you go back to the garden, there's going to be an angel with a flaming sword there to keep us out.

You can't have the garden until you fix the heart, until you solve sin, until you break

down the barrier that is comprised of all of those elements, all of those facets, no relationship, no life, the guilt, the penalty, the corruption, the inherent corruption, the association that ties us to that which has fallen, the curse that fell as a result. God has taken, we've reviewed this in the past, God took the first block off the wall. Nobody will pay the penalty for sin.

Christ has paid the penalty, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2.2. Out of those, I think I defined nine different blocks in the barrier, in the wall. God has knocked the first one off as an earnest, as a good faith and said, look, you were born in sin, you didn't incur the penalty freshly because you were born into sin, you're born into Adam and in Adam all die. So I'll take that first one off.

You didn't ask to be born in sin, you're not gonna have to pay the penalty for sin. My son has paid the penalty. He is the propitiation for the sins, not only of us, but also the whole world.

So that is done, that's fixed. What about the rest? Well, that anticipation was 6,000 years in prospect until the millennial kingdom. 4,000 years from Adam to Christ, 2,000 years roughly for this church age and then a 7,000.

So after six days is highly suggestive here. I'm sure somebody has figured out some other way to interpret it, but as far as I'm concerned, it's another clue as to the biblical length. And we know that a biblical battalion is 1,000 men, it doesn't necessarily mean it's 1,000.

And the 4,000 years from Adam to Christ is pictured and is suggestive in Old Testament scripture, doesn't mean it's a literal 4,000 years. I think it might've been a lot longer, but in terms of God's activity with his people, you get to your 14 generations suggestions in Jesus genealogy. So we come here after six days, Peter, James, and John, his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Now, here's the question as we go to our break. Why doesn't Jesus take the 12? Why only three? And you wonder, was this a question? The disciples, did it come to their minds? They come to this mountain and Jesus says, okay, Thaddeus, Simon the Less, James, the son of Alphaeus, Matthew, you all stay here. Peter and the Thunder brothers, you come.

James and John, his brother, hugely important. Why doesn't it just say Peter, James, and John? Peter, James, and John, his brother. This is back to my two witnesses observation in the book of Revelation.

They are brothers. They bracket the apostolic age. James dies first, John dies last.

But why only these three? As a suggestion and a preview of what's to come, of coming attractions, look at verse 19. The disciples came to Jesus privately and said about the

little boy with the demon and having the fits being cast into the fire. Why could we not cast the demon out? That is one of the major points of this chapter.

And we'll look at it when we return. We're going to see that. We're going to see, of course, the transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah.

What does that signify? But why is it that only Peter, James, and John are there? Well, this is what we'll look at when we come back from the break.