

## Matthew 16:21-26

From time to time you'll hear people who have a pretty high **opinion** of themselves say things like **this**: "There are **two ways** to do everything - the **wrong** way, and **my** way." And lots of people really believe that the old **adage** is true which says, "If you want something done **right**, you have to do it **yourself**." However, most of us would admit that there are **many** different ways to accomplish the same task. What works well for **one** person may not work at **all** for someone **else**. People just have too many differences in **temperament**, as well as in **abilities**, to do everything the same way. Besides, that's **boring**! We like to have a little **variety** in our lives. We like doing things in a way which is a little **different** from everybody else. We are **non-conformists** at heart, even though it's usually much **easier** to just go along with the **crowd**. Performers like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley seem to **agree** with this non-conformist attitude when they sing the popular song, "I Did It **My Way**." It takes strong determination to stand up against everyone else all on your **own**, but in the **end** it helps build your self-respect, and it is well **worth** the effort.

We can all be very happy that **Jesus** didn't just go along with the **crowd** - that He was a **non-conformist** in relation to the **world's** way of thinking. Jesus knew that the **world's** plan for salvation - a plan based on their own **works** - was **ineffective** and **hopeless**. So, He **rejected** their plan - in spite of **opposition** from His own **disciples** - and He saved mankind with His **own** plan. **He Did It His Way**.

Our text today indicates that some new **developments** were beginning to take shape in the lives of Jesus and His disciples. Let's investigate those new developments in three **stages**: a new stage of **knowledge** for the disciples, a new stage of **temptation** for Jesus, and a new stage of **action**, again for Jesus' disciples.

Our text begins, "*From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that He had to go to **Jerusalem** and **suffer** many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be **killed**, and on the third day be **raised** again.*" This rather lengthy sentence is **filled** with contrasts - things which the disciples would have to **sort out**, and add to their **knowledge** about Jesus. For example, Jesus told them that He had to go to **Jerusalem**. They had probably figured **that** much out on their **own**. After all, Jerusalem was the **capital** city, and any up-and-coming politician and/or **religious** leader would have to **go** there to make his presence **felt** - to exert his **influence**. Since they **knew** that Jesus was the **Messiah**, the disciples would naturally have **assumed** that Jesus would have to go to **Jerusalem**.

But, Jesus had **also** told them that in Jerusalem He would have to **suffer** at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. Now **that** was something **new**. Jesus had already told them to watch out for the **yeast** - namely, the **false teachings** of the Pharisees and Sadducees. But now He told them that **He**, the **true** Teacher, would have to **suffer** at the hands of these **false** teachers - and not only to **suffer**, but to actually be **killed** by them! Right here for the first time, Jesus told His disciples **clearly** about His sufferings and death.

Up until this time Jesus had mentioned these events only in **veiled** references. For example, once the disciples of John the Baptist had come to Jesus and asked why it was that the Pharisees **fasted**, and **His** disciples did **not**. Jesus answered, "*Can the attendants of the bridegroom **mourn** while the bridegroom is **with** them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be **taken away** from them, and **then** they will fast.*" We might also remember the time that the Pharisees came to Jesus and demanded a miraculous **sign** as **proof** of His Messiahship. Jesus told them that **no sign** would be given to them, **except** the sign of the Prophet **Jonah**. He said, "*For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" The disciples were obviously **dismayed** when Jesus spoke about His **sufferings** and **death**. But note that Jesus in our text **also** told His disciples **clearly** that He would **rise** again from the dead - for His sentence **concluded**, "... *and on the third day be **raised** again.*" However, the disciples obviously hadn't **heard** that part, or at the very least they didn't **understand** Jesus' words, as we will soon see.

As usual, **Peter** is the one who speaks up. He said, "*May you receive **mercy**, Lord! This will **never** happen to You!*" I don't know if Peter said this because he didn't **want** it to happen, or if he was thinking that **he** wouldn't **allow** it to happen. Such foolish **confidence** on Peter's part isn't at all out of the question when we consider how later on, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter would try to **defend** his Lord from **danger** by using his **sword**. At any rate, it is obvious that Peter didn't **understand** the **importance** of Jesus' dying. For **Peter**, the concept of Messiahship completely **excluded** things like suffering and death. But instead of asking Jesus for an **explanation**, Peter let his **emotions** get in the way of his **faith**. Peter **meant** well - his statement had come out of **love** for Jesus. Yet, his statement was in reality a severe **temptation** which Jesus would have to overcome. And Jesus didn't waste any time in doing so.

Notice how **sharply** Jesus rebuked Peter. He said, "*Get **behind** me, Satan! You are a **snare** to Me because you are not thinking the things of **God**, but the things of **men**.*" So, with this bold outburst of **enthusiasm**, Peter - Petros - the **Rock** - had

quickly become a **snare** - literally a stone on which to **stumble** or **trip**! The Greek word which is used here for **snare** is skandalon. A skandalon is literally the **trigger** - that part of a **trap** to which the **bait** is attached - just like that little piece of metal or plastic on a mousetrap where you fasten the **cheese**. In all cases it is **deadly** to **play around** with that trigger, so Jesus **doesn't**! Although **Peter** wasn't aware of it, **Jesus** knew that Peter was really asking for his own eternal **damnation** - as well as the damnation of **all** people - by asking Jesus **not** to suffer and die and rise. So, Jesus **rebuked** Peter with an emphatic, "**No! I won't** listen to you. I'm **right** when I say I **must** go to Jerusalem. It must be done **My Way**."

No doubt Jesus' **rebuke** was difficult for Peter to accept too. However, it was just the **first** in a **series** of new actions which would be required of the disciples. Jesus told them, "*If anyone wants to follow me, let him **deny** himself, take up his **cross**, and **follow** Me.*" What does it **mean** to be a disciple of Jesus? It means total, unconditional **surrender**. It means denying **ourselves**, and doing things **His Way**. People like wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (whom we heard about in the sermon a couple of weeks ago) were far too **greedy** to deny themselves **anything**. They **should** have been **positive** examples for the people of Israel, but they didn't fit the **description** for disciples of **Jesus**. On the other hand, a man like the Good Samaritan **willingly** denied himself, in order to provide for someone else who was less **fortunate** than he - even though that man was a total **stranger** to him. That's the **mark** of a good disciple. How about **us**? Do we **deny** ourselves so that **others** will gain the **benefit**, and **God** will gain the **glory**? Or are we still trying to selfishly provide **ourselves** with all the latest goodies that the world has to offer?

And what do you suppose Jesus meant when He said that we must take up our **cross**? Many times that phrase is interpreted as meaning that no matter **what** happens, we just have to **put up** with it - to **bear** our cross. But in this particular context, we should think only of the things that we suffer as a **direct result** of being a **follower** of Jesus. Things like: telling the guy who works next to you that you don't appreciate his **language** when it's filled with misuses of God's name, knowing that he's going to accuse you of being a "goody-two-shoes" Christian. Or making the **effort** to **worship** your God and study His **Word**, even when other **friends**, or even members of your own **family**, don't seem to **care**. **These** are the kinds of **crosses** that **non-Christians** don't **have** to endure. Yet, if we want to be Jesus' **disciples**, then there will be times when **we** must **carry** such crosses.

And finally, Jesus says, "**Follow** me," and He tells us how to **do** it. Jesus makes **no claim** that **His Way** will always be **easy**. **Nor** does He claim that **His Way** will always be **popular**. But Jesus **does** claim that **His Way** is the **only** way which

leads to salvation - and that's what's really **important**. Let's listen to Jesus, and **Do It His Way**. Amen.