

Handout

Session Eight: Take Up Your Cross

Memory Verse: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Read Matthew 16:21-28

It is the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew before Jesus foretells his own suffering, death and resurrection. No one wants to hear about a friend or teacher going through suffering or hardship. Peter tries to change this prediction. "God forbid it, Lord" (Matthew 16:22 NRSV) Peter does not want this to happen to Jesus.

1. What makes Peter believe Jesus does not need to go through suffering or death?
2. Why might Peter expect God to intervene first?

Jesus silences such a suggestion with force. "Get behind me Satan!" (Matthew 16:23 NRSV) This is a similar rebuke as found at the time of temptation when Jesus says to the devil, "Away with you, Satan!" (Matthew 4:10 NRSV).

3. What makes Jesus think Peter is speaking the words of Satan?
4. Why might Satan try to convince Jesus not to go through with dying on the cross?

Jesus is not done with Simon Peter. "You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." (Matthew 16:23 NRSV) What a strange twist of events for Peter. Just prior to this confrontation, Peter aced the test about the identity of Jesus when Peter had been asked directly by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15 NRSV)

5. As a human, how could Peter not be setting his mind on human things?
6. How is it possible for humans to set their mind on divine things?

Suffering and self-denial is not reserved just for Jesus, but he invites others to join him in denying themselves, picking up the cross, and following him. Already the disciples are being rejected; could there possibly be more? Jesus is clear: "Absolutely!" It appears impossible for the disciples to hear the promise of resurrection on the third day.

Jesus cuts through any illusion of an easy path to follow Jesus. Discipleship is not a whim, but includes a commitment: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:20 NRSV).

7. What does it mean to "lose one's life"?
8. How would saving one's life be detrimental in the long run?
9. How does someone save his or her life?

Jesus describes a future day when God's mighty angels will come and judgment will be made. This losing one's life in order to have eternal life is serious business. It's all about having priorities.

10. What does Jesus hope followers will remember about being a disciple?