

MATTHEW 16:21-28

LOOKING FORWARD TO SALVATION

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (v. 21). What jumps out at you from this part of Jesus’ teaching. Is it the suffering and death, or is it the raising on the third day? Peter doesn’t like what he hears, and so he takes Jesus aside to rebuke Him. Looking back, we might be shocked at the actions of Peter. Would you think of rebuking Jesus?

Peter had expectations of Jesus. God the Father had just revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That was only a few verses before our text. Peter had left his fishing business to follow this man Jesus whom he would declare to be the Son of God. He had seen Jesus heal people, feed over five thousand people from a few loaves of bread and a few fish and raise people from the dead. Peter was basking in a beautiful revelation of a God who cares for His creation and who wants to restore His people.

But then Jesus makes this major revelation. He talks about Himself in a whole different way than the disciples had been thinking of Jesus. Jesus was going to suffer. Jesus was going to be killed. Do you believe that God can suffer and die? What’s He talking about? Would you want God to suffer and die for you? Is that an appropriate work of God? Many people want to set God straight, because they think they know how God should do things.

Does Peter’s reaction sound familiar to you? Do you ever think that God should do things in a certain way? Do you ever tell God that He shouldn’t do certain things. Being told that God is going to be killed can stun people. Maybe Peter didn’t hear what Jesus said next. Maybe Peter didn’t believe what he heard next. Jesus said that He would be raised from the dead after three days. Do you believe that? Jesus died and came back to life after three days?

Is this your God, a God who can die and come back to life? Maybe for you it’s something else where you have different ideas on how God should act. You want your enemies gone, but God works on them, and you instead, to make us better people. You want your suffering gone, but God strengthens you through it. You want the world to change, but instead God changes you so that you can live in this world. God sees more than we do, and if He should tell us what He sees, we may not believe what He sees.

Let’s accept that Jesus died. Most historians admit that Jesus lived and that Jesus was executed by Romans on a cross. Peter didn’t like it, but it happened. Where the major disagreement comes in is with what Jesus said next, “and on the third day be raised.” How do you respond to such a statement? Is your mind on the things of God or on the things of man? Do

you approach Jesus as a child of Satan, or as a child of God? Jesus is dead. Now journey with me and others and think about how you would respond.

Interestingly, there were no eyewitnesses the moment Jesus rose. Witnesses only saw the aftereffects. It began with the stone being rolled away from the tomb, and continued with the empty grave, and empty grave cloths lying in the same place where they had been when Jesus' body was still within them. The head cloth was neatly folded up on the side.

Mary Magdalene comes and sees the empty tomb, and she runs back to tell the disciples. Would you stay? Would you run away? Would you tell anyone? Two disciples, Peter and John ran out to the tomb. What about the other disciples? Would you go to the tomb to check it out, or would you stay behind? They get there and see what Mary told them, and believing Jesus' body is gone and wondering what happened they go back home. What would you make of this empty tomb? The occupants of tombs are not supposed to leave. What happened to Jesus' body? Was it stolen or moved?

Mary goes back to the tomb and weeps there. We mourn the loss of loved ones, and it can be even harder for us if there's no body to bury, whether the person disappeared or the funeral home lost the body. We need the finality of a burial. We need to be able to say goodbye. We need to be able to grieve. And so Mary grieves first the loss of Jesus at His death, and then second the loss of Jesus with His missing body.

Then she sees angels and Jesus. Is her grief and shock so great that she's now seeing things? Jesus speaks to her and calls her by name and then she knows that it's Him. Grabbing a hold of Him she doesn't want to let go. Your missing family member comes home and you grab them and don't want to let go. 'You're alive! You're alive!' But He tells her that she must let go, and go tell the disciples, and so she does that.

Would you run back to the disciples with Mary? Would you believe Mary's report that Jesus was alive from the dead. Most of these men didn't believe her. Two of them decided to leave town. Along the way they talked about Jesus' triumphal entry, His popularity, His arrest, the trials and His crucifixion. They wondered about the empty tomb and what Mary said, but their hopes and dreams about Jesus were gone. Now, He would not be rescuing them from the Romans. Their dreams were as dead, as they supposed, Jesus was dead.

Then a stranger joined them. He asked what these dejected men were talking about. He listened patiently giving them a chance to express their disappointment and grief. Then He hit them with another shock.

“He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27). Would you think, ‘Oh, now I understand!’? Or would you ask Him how He could be so insensitive to their grief?

They invited Him in for the night, and while having dinner they recognized Him, and then He disappeared before their eyes. They ran back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Would you be confident enough in what you just saw so that you would tell others, or would you keep it to yourself?

The disciples saw Jesus appear in a locked room, but Thomas didn’t believe them when they told him. Yet Thomas believed his eyes when he saw Jesus a week later, calling Him his Lord and his God. How are you doing by now? Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Later on some of the disciples returned to fishing, Peter included. They still weren’t sure about what happened. They didn’t know what to do, and they weren’t about to tell people what they saw. When they came to shore they encountered Jesus again, and upon hearing His voice Peter jumped overboard and swam to Jesus. Peter’s faith was returning and Jesus forgave him for denying Him on the night of His trials, and Jesus reinstated Peter.

Yet, still later on “the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted” – Matthew 28:16-17. After all that I told you some still had their doubts. Do you have doubts about Jesus?

In Baptism, we’re connected with Jesus’ death and resurrection so that, though we will die, we who are baptized will one day be raised to a new life. Not only does the Bible tell you that Jesus rose from the dead, but it tells you that you too will rise from the dead when you have faith in Him.

“All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” – Romans 6:3-5.

When you lose your life for Jesus’ sake, you find your life. The whole world cannot buy salvation for your soul. Jesus has already bought you salvation by His death and resurrection, and so as Christians we now try to set our minds on the things of God, and not on the things of man. May the Holy Spirit enable us to do that and believe. Amen.