

August 11th 2013 The Jesus The World Sees #9: Matthew 16:21-28
On The Road To Jerusalem With Jesus

As I have mentioned often, this series of messages is loosely based on the book by John Dickson entitled *Jesus A Short Life*, and in that book Dickson has a small chapter about Jerusalem.

He mentions the original capture of it by David and emphasizes how for many centuries Jerusalem was venerated as the place where God's Temple stood and where God chose to meet with His people. The Temple, built first by Solomon at the command of God became the reason for the existence of Jerusalem and when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587BC, it was the total destruction of the Temple that crushed the spirit of the people most.

After the Jews returned from exile the Temple was rebuilt and was once again the main focus point of Jerusalem and remained so when Jesus walked this earth, and on the Sunday that He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey it was the Temple that was His destination.

In AD 70, close to 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the city of Jerusalem and its Temple was totally destroyed by the vengeful Roman Empire, and although Jerusalem survives to this day, the Temple has never been rebuilt. In AD 688 Abd el-Melek built the Dome of the Rock mosque on the Temple mount which exists there to this day, despite a constant desire from some religious and right-wing Jews to pull it down and build a third Temple in its place. The newspaper, *Israel & Christians Today* has an article in its most recent copy entitled, *Israeli Minister Calls For Third Temple To Be Built*.

Christians do well to keep a sharp eye upon Jerusalem because the Bible has prophecies about it that are still to be fulfilled.

The main significance of Jerusalem for Jesus as He neared the culmination of His earthly mission however was entirely different to that of anyone else, and He used His final journey towards Jerusalem as an example which those who become His followers must seek to emulate.

Because Jerusalem for Jesus meant the final laying down of His life as a sacrifice for many. That place where He would fulfill prophecies such as those contained in Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and many other places.

And when the time was near for that to happen Jesus' whole focus was to get to Jerusalem. Look with me at Luke 9:51-53

⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a

Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.

As the days drew near for Him to be taken up into heaven.... Note well that it doesn't say, 'as the time approached for Him to die', but for Him to go home to heaven. To return to the glorious fellowship of the Father. Something He no doubt yearned for. Yet before that could happen He had a task to do for the world in Jerusalem on a cross.

So He set His face to go to Jerusalem. That is the literal interpretation of the Greek words used here and it is a very visual word picture for us to contemplate. He set His face to go to Jerusalem and it was obvious to everyone that He would not rest till he got there.

Indeed, it was apparent to the folk in this Samaritan village. I presume Jesus must have been there before and done some amazing stuff, because He sent messengers there expecting the people to provide shelter and food for Him as he passed through on His journey. But they saw in His face His determination to reach Jerusalem as soon as He could and they gave Him the cold shoulder.

His focus on doing the will of God, even though He well knew the agony that lay ahead, was etched upon His face. It was His priority and He let those with Him know that He expects His followers to share that priority with Him. Look at the verses that follow beginning at v57

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

Here is Jesus walking along the road to Jerusalem. The road towards doing God's will first in His life, whatever the cost, and this man says, I will follow you wherever you go. Do you think he truly understood what he was promising? I doubt it! And do we understand that Jesus is still on the road of doing the will of the Father first, when we agree to follow Him??

Jesus never told that man that He couldn't follow Him, but he stressed to him and the other two that are mentioned that following Jesus means sharing His passion for God's kingdom whatever it costs us, and making sure that pleasing God in all things is a greater priority in our lives than pleasing ourselves.

This last week I looked at a film that I will probably use in our study sessions at the church family camp in November that is entitled NOT A FAN, and it challenged me greatly about my response to the one who died for me. Because it asks the question, are you a fan of Jesus...content to believe in Him and trust in Him as long as the cost is not too great? Or are you a follower who is prepared to take up your cross daily and follow Him. Prepared to put doing God's will first in your life.

On the road to Jerusalem Jesus stressed that following Him involves cost and sacrifice. Jerry White wrote:

"Ordinary people who make simple, spiritual commitments under the lordship of Jesus Christ make an extraordinary impact on their world. Education, gifts, and abilities do not make the difference. Commitment does."

Our Bible reading from Matthew 16 this morning began with Jesus explaining why He must go on the road to Jerusalem. That was His commitment and he knew full well what that commitment would involve for Him. Matt 16:21 says

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

He was prepared to make that commitment in order that millions of people through the ages would be saved from the kingdom of darkness and everlasting judgment into the kingdom of heaven and eternal salvation.

And He also expected those who benefitted from His commitment and chose to follow Him to make their own commitment to the extension of His Kingdom. And it is this commitment that He goes on describe in verse 24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

There is in human beings this tendency towards selfishness or self-centred-ness. It begins as a survival technique but often manifests itself in a preference to care for ourselves, our needs, comforts, desires first—before God or others. Jesus calls us to put to death that aspect of our lives and to be prepared to accept any cost involved in putting God or others first. To follow His example. To tread the road to Jerusalem with Him because of what He has done for us, and so that others will see Him through us.

I wasn't surprised with one of the hymns that David chose today because I know that he had it at his baptism. But I was amazed at how closely the hymn 'Be Thou My Vision' fits in with this command of Jesus for His followers. Especially the verses that say:

***Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
Be Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.***

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,

***Be Thou my inheritance now and always;
Be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart;
O sovereign of heaven, my treasure Thou art.***

So Easy to sing. But how true are those sentiments for us?

In that film "Not a Fan", there is a scene in which the main character is returning home with his wife after he has recovered from a heart attack. He is still not well and is rather wobbly and they stop at a service centre to get petrol and he gets out of the car to go into the shop. A lady approaches him with her young daughter and asks for money for food for her daughter because they hadn't eaten since the day before. He tells her 'no' because he has no cash on him and has just got out of hospital—seems fair enough to me.

However this man was just a nominal Christian before his heart attack and that has made him start to think about the depth of his Christian commitment. So while he is in the shop he thinks again about the woman and her child—how Jesus said, I was hungry and you didn't feed me—buys some food, takes it outside and gives it to the family.

But he doesn't stop there. We discover later on in the film that he went back and sought that lady out. He helped her to find a place to live in and ongoing support for her and her daughter. By his practical love for her, her life was turned around and she began to seek the Saviour He followed.

To my mind that was the moment when he chose to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. When he went beyond that which was comfortable. When the cross he took up cost him more than otherwise he would have done.

As I thought about that it made me realize that too often we agree to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem but then leave the road when it looks like becoming too costly. We do so much but then stop when the opening is there for us to do more. To take what we do a little further or indeed, a lot further. Jesus assures us of a glory to come that is reserved for us and then calls us to put God, His kingdom, and others first in our thinking, doing, and praying, so that many other flesh and bone people like us, may truly benefit from the Lord of Glory who was crucified for them