

The Road to the Cross

Matthew 20:17-19

Introduction

Simple But Profound: What do you do with a passage that we've already *basically* preached two other times (cf. Matt 16:21-23).

- 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 (Matt 16:21).
- ²² As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, ²³ and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day" (Matt 17:22-23).
- ¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day" (Matt 20:17-19).

(1) **Repetitive:** The similarities highlight things that are important (say them again and again).

(2) **Comparative:** The differences highlight things that are important (fuller explanation, emphasis, etc.).

(3) **Progressive:** The progression from one to another tells a story (movement and context).

A Different Kind of Sermon: We want to take a wide angle view. As we travel from story to story, we get the closeup angle. We want to synthesize the larger story into some of its theological themes; **big picture** (e.g., read, dissect, breakdown but don't forget to read the whole thing from start to finish as a comprehensive whole; 2.5 hours Matthew)

Jesus demonstrates the values of the Kingdom of God as he walks obediently to the cross and invites us to follow him on that path.

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1. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the Center of the Kingdom of God

Prone to Wander: Why are there so many repeated themes in Jesus' teaching? Why is this the third time we have heard this prediction? We are tempted to avoid or ignore important things *especially* if they aren't what we want (i.e., conveniently forget).

¹ . Καὶ ἀναβαίνων ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παρέλαβεν τοὺς δώδεκα [μαθητὰς] κατ' ἰδίαν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, ¹⁸ Ἰδοὺ ἀναβαίνομεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδοθήσεται τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσιν καὶ γραμματεῦσιν, καὶ κατακρινούσιν αὐτὸν θανάτῳ ¹⁹ καὶ παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ ἐμπαῖξαι καὶ μαστιγῶσαι καὶ σταυρῶσαι, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθήσεται.

- “Organizational psychologists, of Northwestern University and Harvard Business School, respectively, found that recalling unsavory actions causes ‘psychological discomfort,’ so people have fuzzier memories of the bad things they’ve done.” The moment of your kindness? Crystal clear. The time you lied? Fuzzy. It’s part of our sinful tendency to overemphasize our goodness and downplay our shortcomings.

We do this with the gospel as well. We conveniently *forget* challenging aspects of the gospel in lieu of our preferred earthly methods (i.e., maybe a little bit of power won’t hurt, the ends justify the means, they really should try harder, etc.).

- How often has God done something for you, then you forget? Peter confesses Christ (i.e., “rock”) and then opposes his death (i.e., “get behind me Satan”). I am like Peter, I see the miracles, I experience deliverance, then I forget. I’m the unforgiving servant.

Spiritual amnesia is the root of so many problems. We get so familiar with the gospel that we fail to feel it’s weight. We get so distracted by the world that we forget it’s importance. We get so overwhelmed by our problems that we forget it’s power. We get so impressed by ourselves that we forget the great depths from which we were saved. **We don’t have the luxury to forget** (e.g., working with power tools, saws; youtube carpenter).

- We have to **remember to remember**. We have to ground our lives in the gospel (it’s why we talk about being “gospel-centered”). The gospel is not merely a priority among our list of priorities, able to be shuffled and moved around based on our feelings at any given moment, **it is the page on which all of our priorities are written**.
- The work of Jesus, crucified and risen, is the central summary of our Christian hope, a hope that Heb 6:19 describes as an “anchor of the soul.” Think about what an anchor does. In the middle of a powerful current or a raging storm, the anchor holds the ship steady. It keeps it from being dragged out to sea.
 - What are you anchored to? Something that is also drifting (e.g., tubing down a river tied to other tubes) or something that is immovable (e.g., Jesus).
 - Culture changes. People drift. Preferences shift. Jesus doesn’t. He is a firm foundation for all people in all places at all times.

Micro and Macro Gospel: In a macro sense (big picture), the gospel is the entire story that God is telling from creation to restoration. The gospel is good news that starts in Genesis and ends in Revelation. It is the story that is being told through his people, the church. It is the story of his reign of the kingdom he is establishing over all things. It is news because it is announcing the reign of God and it is good because his arrival brings about our salvation. But, at the **pinnacle** of that story, at the **peak** of the mountain, the **climax** of the good news, is the death and resurrection of Jesus. So Paul can meaningfully talk about the “gospel [he] preached” which we “[receive], in which [we] stand, and by which [we] are being saved” as centering on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:1-2).

- This is why Paul bookends his first letter to the Corinthians church with the cross and the resurrection:
 - For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor 1:22-24).

- And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain (1 Cor 15:14).

They are not the sum total of all the gospel entails but they are the central substance. **They are like the hub of the wheel into which the spokes connect, they give the gospel story unity and power** (hence “gospel-centered”). Everything flows into and out of these things.

Implications: This has a lot of implications. **Everything is not the gospel but the gospel impacts everything** (your marriage, your job, your parenting). The gospel changes the way you vote, spend your money, and love your neighbor, etc.

- By keeping the gospel central it protects all of these other things from becoming idols while *at the same time* elevating them as means of showing God’s glory.
 - Your **marriage** will be stronger if you don’t idolize it but, rather, allow the gospel to shape its purposes and patterns.
 - Our fight for **justice** in our community will be stronger when we don’t idolize the pursuit of justice but, rather, allow the gospel to shape our convictions, patterns, and motivation for justice. There is no peaceful end to the pursuit of justice that doesn’t flow from the heart of our crucified and risen Savior.

Keeping the gospel central protects us from soapbox causes, and pet issues; it protects us from elevating the implications of the gospel to the status of “gospel” while continuing to propel us to work out the implications of the gospel in every area of life.

- As Christians, our worldview is determined by the gospel yet we live inside of and are contributors to human culture. It can be disorienting to figure out how to live in relation to the cultural influences of the world. “Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and because of that fact, every aspect of our lives should be affected by the fact that we are Christians” (Ashford, Kuyper).
 - Too many allow their family to determine their faith -or- their political affiliation to determine their vote -or- their personal preferences to determine their morality.
- **The gospel frees us to see culture for what it is.** The gospel tells the story that makes sense and makes sense of! “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (C. S. Lewis.). We can see the **beauty and brokenness** of the world clearly *because* of the good news of Jesus (e.g., good by design; bad by direction).

If the death and resurrection of Jesus are real and are central (which they are), then sin matters, justice matters, people matter, and truth matters; and **all of them are determined and directed by the unchanging will of God, rather than the distorted whims of people.**

Gospel-Centered: The gospel is not at odds with the values of the kingdom, rather it grounds them in the concrete realities of Jesus’ love, sacrifice, and justice. The call to love your neighbor as yourself, to live dependent on the provision of God, to abandon everything that threatens to derail your discipleship is rooted in these central gospel moments.

- The phrase “gospel-centered” has been on quite an upward trajectory the last decade. I’ve seen books on gospel-centered preaching, ministry, parenting, financial management (waiting for gospel-centered fishing, hair-care, and HVAC maintenance).

It's faddish overuse shouldn't dissuade us from its importance. **If the gospel is not the center of our lives, then something else will try to take its place**, some lesser person, place, thing, or idea that *invariably* will let us down, mislead, or disappoint us. "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

- Your work won't give you life, the gospel will. And the gospel can give real, eternal purpose to your work.
- Your marriage won't give you life, the gospel will. And the gospel can provide real, sacrificial love for your marriage.
- Your money won't give you life, the gospel will. And the gospel free you from the dangers of envy to the joys of generosity.

2. The Path of Discipleship is an Invitation to Follow Jesus to the Cross

Take Up Your Cross: In the previous prophecies of his death, Jesus described himself (e.g., the Son of Man, "he" must go). In this final prediction, the pronoun becomes "we." We are going up to Jerusalem. There's a sense that Jesus is inviting these disciples to continue with him to the cross.

- Isn't that what discipleship is? A call to die (Bonhoeffer).
- "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:38).
- "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'" (Matt 16:24).

Jesus is willingly walking to his own death; if we are to follow him, then our path has a crucified shape. In fact, there is no life in Christ until there is death to self. The resurrection isn't possible without the crucifixion. On the other side of death is life; a paradox of the Christian life: you can't live until you die.

- **Danger of a lot of rapture theology.** If you read Revelation and think the goal of following Jesus is to escape suffering, then you miss the point. God gives us the strength to endure, to make it to the other side, to overcome. God has not called us to escape suffering, but to trust him through it.
 - "And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'" (Jn 12:23-25).
- "Do you not know that 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. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For

the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:3-11).

If we are really going to follow Christ, we can't skip the cross and go straight to the resurrection. Life is on the other side of death.

- Let your dreams die, so that you can find the dream that God has for you.
- Let your desires die, so you can find new desires for the things of God.

There is life on the other side of dying to yourself, and it is real life, the kind of life actually worth living, but it can't be found until you take up your cross and follow him.

- **What things of in your life is Christ calling you to put to death?**

On the Way: When Jesus *first* predicted his death, they were in the northern part of the country, the second time they were still in Galilee and starting the long journey south. At this point they are on the cusp of entering Jerusalem. The predictions of his death have gone from an abstract future reality to something imminent (something seemingly far away, abstract, finally coming close; e.g., special vacation, graduation, due date, etc.).

- They've been following Jesus for a while. They've left careers to travel with this itinerant teacher. They have moments of revelation and moments where they still don't get it (e.g., shooing the children away). Here's what I love about the first disciples, they knew and trusted Jesus even when they didn't fully understand where they were going.
- **They're obedience outpaced their understanding.** I'd rather have one person who will do what God says and go where God goes than a hundred who know every detail of theology but refuse to obey. For all of the missteps and mistakes of the disciples, they get the main thing right: **they trust and obey Jesus**. You don't have to know the future to follow Jesus in the present (e.g., "lamp unto my feet").

Revelation 14:4: "It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev 14:4). The picture of the faithful in Revelation are those that do what Jesus, the lamb does. They endure what the Lamb endures. They conquer the way the Lamb conquers (sacrifice).

- When we baptize someone here we ask, "will you do whatever the Lord tells you to do and go wherever the Lord tells you to go?"
- You have to follow Christ where *he* goes (not ask him to endorse where *you want* to go) (e.g., your opinion in a deeper voice; making Jesus sound a lot like you).

3. Jesus' Death and Resurrection Demonstrates the Inverse Values of His Kingdom

Choice: Everything God calls us to do, he will empower us to accomplish. And every path he calls us to walk, he has walked before us.

- Notice, the detail in Jesus' latest prophecy: And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."
- He goes from predicting his death generally to describing the gruesome manner of his death specifically: (crucified), tortured (flogged), shamed (mocked). He understands the

Jewish religious elite and Gentile political machine that must conspire to accomplish his wicked death. He is walking deliberately and intentionally to his death, and not any death, but the unimaginably painful death of crucifixion.

- “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (Jn 10:18).
 - When Jesus calls you to serve, he has served more. When Jesus calls you to surrender, he’s surrendered more. When Jesus calls you to go, he’s gone farther.

Inverted Values: We see in the cross and the resurrection the values of the Kingdom of God, values that often seem upside down to the world. We see the justice of God on full display as he sacrifices himself for our sins, while also seeing the grace of God as his forgiveness is extended to sinners and sufferers alike. We see the victory of God over evil, the wrong is made right, as the son of God rises from the dead, defeating death.

- But this is **not** the way of the world. The world conceives of power, wealth, and status as the path to victory. It can’t imagine that the Savior would suffer. The King came to serve rather than be served. The most valuable characteristics in the Kingdom are not intelligence, success, or skill but dependence, humility, and faith.
- Jesus is the perfect example of the values of the Kingdom, a suffering servant who came to give his life for the ransom of many (e.g., Phil 2).

Generous Justice: On the cross we see the perfect demonstration of God’s justice and his grace. Sin is paid for (not just ignored) but grace is extended.

Conclusion:

Lord’s Supper: At the end of each weekly gathering we invite those who have been baptized as believers (repented of sin, placed faith in Christ, and obeyed him by being baptized) to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

- There are a lot of reasons why we do this, it is a moment of communion with God. It is a means that God has commanded to demonstrate our obedience and extend his grace. But one of the central reasons we do it, is “**in remembrance**” of Jesus, of his death and resurrection. The bread and the juice are visual representation of the broken body and spilt blood of our Savior; they’re meant to evoke our memory.
- Just like the disciples are walking the path to Jerusalem, distracted by the crowds, worried about the provision, and uncertain of all that will lie ahead; we are on the road with Jesus, trying to follow but often being distracted by the cares of the world. So, each week we take the Lord’s Supper to **remember what really matters**, to recalibrate our hearts and souls to the gift that gave us life and the sacrifice that defines our lives.

How would your attitude change if you remembered the depth of Jesus’ sacrifice and the breadth of his gift of life?

- I believe it would fill your heart with gratitude.
- I believe it would remind you of what real gospel-love looks like.
- I believe it would call you to a life of following Jesus to the cross (to die to yourself) and, through his grace, to find life (real life) here and forever.

- I believe it would humble you because it's all by grace. It's grace by which you have been saved. It is grace in which you live. And it is grace which you and I have been called to show others.