

Suffering: The Only Pathway to Glory

By Daryl Wingerd



Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They answered, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:13-14). There apparently was much confusion and speculation among the masses concerning his identity.

He then asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter, a natural leader among

this group of humble men, was the first (and only?) one to reply. His answer was bold and accurate: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv. 15-16).

Peter nailed it, and Jesus commended him for his answer saying that God himself had revealed it to him (v. 17). He went on to speak of building his indestructible church and of an earthly authority in the church that would be recognized and reflected in heaven (vv. 18-19). Peter was undoubtedly riding high in his emotions at this point, having been publicly commended by Jesus and anticipating sharing in the glory of his coming kingdom.

A short time later, however, 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).

Peter was troubled by this apparent contradiction of what Jesus had just been saying about his coming kingdom and the indestructibility of the church. He could not fathom how suffering and death could possibly be the destiny of the one he had just been commended for accurately identifying as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” So, he once again assumed his leadership role. This time, however, he missed the mark entirely and badly overstepped his bounds. He took Jesus aside and “began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’” (v. 22).

Jesus’ response to Peter’s rebuke was shocking: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (v. 23). He then immediately delivered the following address to a stunned Peter and the rest of

the disciples: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (vv. 24-27).

When we examine all of this, we glean the following:

1. Peter’s rebuke of Jesus was most likely motivated by his fear that whatever happened to their leader would also happen to them. He and the other disciples anticipated sharing in Jesus’ future glory, but they were not yet prepared to suffer and die to obtain it.

2. When rebuking Jesus for speaking of his coming suffering, Peter failed to realize that he was encouraging Jesus to disobey his Father. That was why Jesus said to Peter, “You are a hindrance to me.” Suffering for one’s faith in Christ is God’s will and the destiny of every true Christian (2 Tim. 3:12). It is not a misstep to avoid at any cost. We should never be a hindrance to other Christians by tempting them to avoid persecution through compromise, disobedience, or denial of Christ (cf. Matt. 10:32-33).

3. Glory does indeed follow suffering. Jesus spoke not only of his death in verse 21, but also his resurrection. Then in verse 27, he spoke of coming “in the glory of his Father” to accomplish the final judgment of men. He saw his future glory clearly, though he also saw that the pathway to it led through suffering and death.

4. Glory with Christ is the destiny of every true Christian. In verse 24 Jesus spoke of those who would “come after me.” But suffering with and for Jesus is the only pathway to that glory. As Jesus said in direct response to Peter’s rebuke, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Those who are truly following Jesus are carrying the cross along the way, willing to suffer with and for their Lord.

Peter did not grasp all of this at the time, but he did later. It was Peter who wrote, “For this is a gracious thing when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. . . . For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:19, 21).