

## Article: Get behind Me, Satan!

Sometimes, we go to church, and all we really want to hear is some good news, some reassuring message that everything is going to be all right, that life is not really as bad as it may seem, and that the sun will rise tomorrow. Often, this is the comforting message we receive. The Good News of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Good News of salvation for lost and condemned sinners like us. So, we come in here as broken and empty-handed beggars with nothing to offer, no work to show off, and once again hear about salvation by grace alone. Yet sometimes, the message we hear (which, quite frankly, we need to hear) is not just about better days tomorrow or the promise of eternal joy, but it is the honest reflection of lives that will be marked by struggle and hardship. They are lives of discipleship that will know the weight of bearing a cross here and now.

Saint Peter once made an incredible confession of the faith, a beautiful revelation of the identity of the Son of Man. Remember, Jesus asked, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter replies, “*You are the Christ, the son of the living God*” (Matt. 16:15-16). Our Lord then explains how this confession was revealed to Peter by His Father in heaven, and upon this statement the Church will be built. The whole thing is quite powerful. So, Jesus follows up by giving a few details as to what it means to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. What does it look like? What does the Christ do? Matthew says, “*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*” (16:21). To be the Christ is to go the way of the cross, to suffer many things, to be killed, and rise again on the third day. This is what the Son of God has come to do.

Notice what Peter does here. When Jesus said this, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “*Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You...*” (v. 22). Good old Peter! He stops doing the very thing that makes a disciple a disciple. He stops following. He stops following and takes the lead, redirecting our Lord away from the direction He has just said He must go. Of course, Peter seems to have good intentions. He does not want his Lord to suffer and die. He cannot imagine this is the path of the Christ, the Son of the living God. How could it be? It does not make any sense. Why would God come to suffer? Why would God come to die and rise again? There must be another way this can go, an alternative path that is marked by glory, prestige, power, and dominion over all that is evil and wrong in this age. That is what Peter wants. That’s what we all want. What good is there in suffering? What benefit is there to a cross?

But our Lord will not tolerate any of this. He will not be led around by anyone. He will not be turned from the path He has come to walk. So, Jesus turns toward this man, to whom just five verses earlier He said, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*” And now He says, “*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). Peter finds himself in the role of the ancient tempter, seeking to hinder Jesus from the path He must walk. He demands his Lord to fit his ideal of what the Christ is supposed to be. Instead of following, he will lead. Instead of receiving, he will give. Instead of trusting, he will rebuke, and he is immediately checked by our Lord.

This exchange leads to an important teaching regarding suffering and the life of a disciple. As Peter is quickly placed back in the role of following, Jesus tells all His disciples that suffering will come. He says, “*If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*” (v. 24-25). There it is. To follow Jesus is not to be marked by victory, glory, and prestige. It is not a recipe to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. No, to follow Jesus is to carry a cross. It is to lose your life, not save it. See, there is a consequence that comes from being a believer. It is a fairy tale to think you can follow Jesus without an impact on your life. Believing He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and trusting in your life, not just in the ways you want it or may be convenient to you. This just may empty you out, break you down, and shatter your dreams. That said, our experience in the Church in this age has not helped us to understand and embrace the radical call of discipleship. Most of us have only known the Church as a place society embraces as useful and is often regarded as no different than any other social club found in civilised society. It is a place of polite conversation and the promotion of good citizens. We get dressed up a bit more than usual; we find some convenient ways of feeling better about ourselves through service, and off-we-go to live our lives, mostly unscathed. But it has not always been like this. The faith we confess, that we sing and celebrate, was handed down to us through the blood of martyrs, through suffering and opposition. It would divide families, be the cause of betrayal, and the reason you ended up in prison. To follow Christ could mean torture and even death. I tend to think this reality is quickly changing, that the Church’s privileged position is eroding, but overall, we have been spoiled in our day. Because of this, we have all been seduced by the lie that suffering is the greatest evil of our age. Like Peter, we have difficulty seeing suffering and cross-bearing as part of the

plan. So, when you do suffer, when hardships and turmoil come into your life, it is first understood as always something outside of the faith. Of course, we do not know persecution the way the early Church did, but we do suffer. You struggle with mental anguish and depression. You have painful regrets and deep sadness in your life. Perhaps you are alone, too afraid to let anyone in to see the turmoil and mess that is your reality. As a result, you can easily imagine that perhaps if you prayed the right words or offered the right service, you could fix it, you could overcome it, you could save yourself.

Look, the world is full of prosperity preachers who have this exact message: The promise that faith will save you from your suffering. But this does not seem to be the message our Lord actually gives to us. No, He says we are to take up our crosses and follow. You are not to try and leave your cross behind or somehow overcome your cross so you can really do the work of following. No, following is the bearing of the cross. It is to live a disjointed life, a life where suffering is real, hardships are real, and doubt and anguish are real. Yet, it is a life of endurance, promise, and hope. It is the mark of a life lived knowing this age will pass and a more glorious day will come. It is a life where suffering is not outside the work of God, but it is often right there in the midst of the pain where He does His greatest work. That is what we see on Calvary, which is the gift of divine suffering and death for your salvation.

I know, Jesus is brutal in His correction to Peter. His command to, “*Get behind Me Satan,*” is not easy to forget. But perhaps there is a way we can see this in a positive way. Behind Jesus is where Peter belongs. It is where we all belong. After all, we are His disciples, His followers. Therefore, the call of “*get behind Me*” does not have to be a rebuke. It can be a command from our General who leads us into the battle. Get behind Me as Jesus goes first, to suffering, to death, to the resurrection, and to the right hand of the Father. Get behind Me, He says, for He is your Advocate, your Deliverer, your Hope, and Salvation. He holds you in the storm. He speaks into your terror. Jesus loves you in your doubt and pain. So, what else can we do but take up our cross and follow.