



# Study Series

Follow Me: Week Seven

Turning point: Marc Rader

## Bible

Matthew 16:21-28 (NIV)

### Jesus Predicts His Death

**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.

**22** Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

**23** Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the

concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

**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? **27** For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his

angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

28 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

## Sermon Summary

Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ (or the Messiah) marks a turning point in Matthew's gospel. From this point on Jesus begins to teach the disciples what it means for Him to be the Messiah. And the bottom line is that He will suffer, die, and be raised again. This is not at all what was expected by the disciples and they struggle to come to terms with this teaching. In Matthew's account this is highlighted by the "misunderstandings" that occur after each prediction of Jesus' death (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). In fact, the focus for Matthew in these predictions is not on what Jesus' death accomplishes or means, (we have to wait to learn the answer to this most important question) but upon what it means to follow a suffering Messiah.

Each of the predictions are followed almost immediately by a "misunderstanding" where Jesus teaches about discipleship. In the first instance, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him for even suggesting that the Messiah would suffer and die (resurrection or not!). Jesus identifies any other form of Messiah as reflecting the plans of Satan not God and then teaches that followers must deny themselves and take up their cross (the first mention of the cross in the gospel). The second prediction is followed by the disciples asking who was the greatest in the kingdom (18:1-4). Jesus responds by bringing a child into their midst and calling them to become like them and to welcome them. This is not a call to innocence or naivety but a call to set aside status, power, and influence and to welcome those who cannot offer you anything in return. The third prediction is followed by the sons of Zebedee asking for places of authority when Jesus comes into his kingdom. Jesus then confronts the indignant disciples with their desire for power and teaches that followers must become the servant of all.

This provides the pattern for following Jesus. And the pattern is essentially about submission to the will of the Father. This is what Jesus did as He faced His suffering and death and it is what we are called to do. This act of submission lies at the heart of the crisis of faith that following Jesus eventually brings.

Submission is made up of two emotions. On the one hand (the one that we tend to emphasise) is acceptance. Submission includes an acceptance of the position, authority, privilege, rights, or power of the one to whom we are submitting to. This acceptance may

be based in trust which makes submission easier, but it is only one half of the emotion. The other side of submission is apprehension based on a fear that the one whose authority, power, privilege, or rights we are accepting may not use their position for our benefit. This fear is what makes submission difficult but it must be acknowledged. In the Garden of Gethsemane we hear both sides in Jesus' request that the cup of suffering be taken from Him (apprehension) along with an acceptance of the Father's will (not my will, but yours be done). This act of submission is the essence of discipleship.

For any one who has begun to follow Jesus this is where the crisis of faith will eventually take place; our apprehensions about what happens when we accept God's will for our lives coupled with an acceptance of his goodness, love, and grace. For anyone who has come to accept Jesus submission is an ongoing act as we continue to bring our apprehensions and acceptance to a position where we can submit.

In the weeks to come we will see what Jesus' death means and what it accomplishes in more detail, but at this point in the gospel Matthew is concerned to show us what it means to follow the suffering and dying (and resurrected) Messiah.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation, their depth comes from a willingness to engage with the implications of our reflections for how we live our lives. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What does healthy submission look like? Describe a context in which you have had to submit to someone else. How did submitting in this context make you feel? Did you experience apprehension or acceptance or both? Share your reflections with the group.
2. Read Matthew 16:21-28 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been lead to.

3. Jesus confronted a clash of expectations from His disciples who wanted power, influence, authority, etc. Instead Jesus calls them to self-denial and service. How does a desire for our own good get in the way of submission?
4. Are there areas in your life where you have apprehensions that make it hard to submit to Jesus? Take a moment of silence to reflect on this question. You may want to answer it on paper for yourself and invite the group if anyone is willing to share.
5. In August 2017 TIME magazine reported that the secret to happiness was helping (or serving) others. Whilst following Jesus may not guarantee happiness, Jesus does invite us into the best way to live. How might our love of Jesus, and more specifically, God's love of us, inspire practical steps towards a life in service of others this week?
6. As we approach Easter, how might we begin to engage with Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane this week. What gives you confidence in God's will?  
Matthew 26:39 (NIV) Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

## Prayer

Take some time to pray for each other, and in particular, consider each other's responses to question 6. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into areas of more faithful submission to Jesus, inviting God's will to be done in our lives.