

The Church's Cost

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to echo Jeremy's welcome to you all. It's wonderful to have you here today, especially if you're new with us. We have just started a sermon series on part of Matthew, Matthew 16 through 20. And we started last week with an incredible confession that Peter gave.

And there's a change of fortunes for Peter today. He is praised for what he said last week. He is rebuked for what he said today. But this is an amazing passage because what Jesus does here, and I think what makes it difficult for Peter, is he shows what kind of Messiah he is. He makes very clear what it means that he is the king whom God has sent into the world. And the wonderful thing about this passage is it has incredible implications for all of us that are here today.

What it tells us and what it shows us is that Jesus shapes our life, and he shapes our life in a certain way. He makes our lives to be cross-shaped by his power. And this passage in three ways tells us the profound ways that Jesus changes us. It tells us that he makes us, he gives us a blueprint, a cross-shaped blueprint, by suffering for us and saving us in verse 21. And then he talks about how the Messiah gives us a cross-shaped interior life because he grips us with God's agenda so that our minds and our hearts are shaped by his cross. And then thirdly, Jesus invites us to sacrifice so that we are outwardly cross-shaped in our life as well. And so that's what I'll talk about. That could have been a short sermon. It's all right there. It's finished. That's in verses 24 through 26. And then I'm going to briefly talk about how Jesus' promises right at the end are a deep encouragement for us.

And the thing is that in this passage, which you can turn to on page 822, everything that's here is about costly grace. And that's a name that Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, talks about. It's a very helpful term, costly grace, because it's a costly grace in that Jesus' costly grace changes us. And we respond with costly grace as well. So let's look into this.

The highest form of costly grace is in verse 21. Jesus says, Now, this is upside-down thinking for the world. Because if Jesus is the true Messiah, he should go to Jerusalem, and he should set up his throne to rule God's people, and to bring his goodness into the world in a very powerful way and change it from that political place. But Jesus turns that completely around. He says, Yes, I'm going to Jerusalem, but I'm going there, disciples, to suffer and to die and then to rise again, be raised by the Father. And I'm going to suffer and die at the hands of that people that I am the Messiah of. It's a profoundly costly mission that Jesus is talking about. It looks like failure to the world. Because Jesus, who himself is God, who left the glory of heaven, takes the form of a servant. And not only a servant, but a suffering servant, who dies the worst death in human history. And it's the worst death because it's not only his physical death, which was awful enough, but it was the spiritual death of taking upon himself all sin.

[4 : 25] And this is the weight of what Jesus is talking about. The perfect Jesus, who knew no sin at all, becomes sin for us, that we might become his righteousness. And the reason this is so powerful is that sin is our greatest problem. From the very earliest age, we got good at saying no, first to our parents, and we also say no to our heavenly Father as well. And we are lost in our sin, separate from the Father, and under his good and right judgment. This is the problem.

But Jesus takes on himself all that separates, all that makes us rebel against God. All evil, pain, suffering, injustice, he took that upon himself on a cross. This is the meaning of his suffering and death. God's Son, who was united perfectly in love to the Father, knew the utter darkness of being separated from the heavenly Father and dying in our place. This is costly. This is the costly part of what Jesus is talking about. But the grace is that by the power of his death, he takes away our sin, he purifies us, he reconciles us to God the Father, and he adopts us as his children. He's raised on the third day, he says, as our king, which means he can powerfully draw us to the Father, not just now, but right through death, into eternity with him. And I want you to notice that in that little verse,

Jesus says, I must go to die in Jerusalem. And that word must means absolutely necessary that I go, absolutely necessary. In other words, it was God's plan from the very beginning of eternity, before the time existed in the world, he planned this saving work. In unimaginable love for us, he planned to save us completely and forever. And the great implication that defi- uh, that great implication is that that truth defines you. That truth shapes the direction of your life. God places a cross-shaped blueprint on our lives when we come to trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ, when we trust in his suffering to save us. Uh, about a month ago, we had a funeral. And, uh, it was the funeral of a friend of mine named

Gordon McGee, who several of you know very, very well. And, uh, his life is a wonderful example of that cross-shaped blueprint that God places on a person. Uh, you may know that Gordon was paralyzed in an accident in his early twenties. And, uh, he was, after that accident, he was in the worst sort of dark place of the soul that you can imagine. He was not a Christian. And, um, and in the time of his greatest despair, a nun came and prayed for him very simply. And in that prayer, she talked about the gospel.

She talked about Jesus. And he said that it was like a light went on in his heart and his mind. And for the first time, he knew with all his heart that God accepted him, that God loved him, even when he was an enemy of God, and that he was God's child by Jesus' forgiveness.

[8 : 16] Well, what that did from that moment is to put a blueprint of the cross on his life. And his life utterly changed. And in his, uh, in his paralysis, his body inwardly became filled by the Holy Spirit's work in his life. And he had a profound ministry throughout his life of prayer, of growing himself in Christ through all of the difficulties and all the brokenness that he had. Uh, he had a real ministry of evangelism too. He shared with everybody he knew. And he also had a ministry of encouragement because he was deeply thankful to God in all of the incredible challenges that he faced throughout his life in dealing with his paralysis. Uh, he shared his faith with everybody he saw and talked about how good God was for him. He reconciled with his family. He was, uh, a deep encouragement to me personally because he prayed for me, but also I would go away from this person who was deeply thankful and trusting in Jesus and thinking, um, I can do much better here. Um, you see the strength of his faith was a witness to many. And what happened for him is really what happens for each of us as well.

Jesus' costly grace gives to you the incredible gift of a cross-shaped life. He gives to us a costly grace that defines who we are, that changes us forever. And it is the blueprint that he builds your life on. So it starts with Jesus' suffering to save us. Now, secondly, Jesus, uh, gives us a cross-shaped interior and he does it by gripping us with God's agenda, gripping our hearts and our minds and our souls. You see this in verses 22 and 23. Uh, Peter gets very alarmed as Jesus is showing them that he must suffer. And he takes Jesus aside and he rebukes him and he says, far be it from you, Lord, that shall never happen to you. Now, Peter might not have realized that he's making a terrible contradiction here. He's saying, Lord, and then he's saying, no. Well, those two things can't go together. How can you say no to the one that you have called your Lord? And I wonder if you ever experienced this in your life. It's very easy to fall into. You call Jesus Lord, but you may say no to him in what you are saying and what you are doing. What would make Peter do this? Well, he may have had the best of intentions. He thought it's impossible for a Messiah to suffer and die. He has to be glorious. Uh, he may have loved Jesus personally. He did. Didn't want it to happen to him. But he also may have thought that, oh, my own position, if that happens, will be unpleasant. What will happen to my glory? What will happen to my exalted status? Um, should I be hitching myself to this wagon?

Well, Jesus turns to face Peter and, uh, he says something that Peter would never have forgotten. He said, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. Literally, you are a stumbling block to me.

Isn't that an opposite of what just happened in his confession? What he meant was that Peter was saying the same thing that Satan said to Jesus when he tempted him in the wilderness. He's saying, you don't have to go through with this mission, which is from the beginning of time, to suffer and die for the salvation of the world. Peter's words here are an obstacle to Jesus' mission. And it's quite a contrast to that amazing confession that Jesus is the Messiah, which is the foundation to build on.

So Jesus rebukes him. But Jesus doesn't leave him there in that rebuke. He says words in verse 23 that are a key to helping him forever and us as well, um, to take on Jesus' agenda in our lives, in our hearts and in our minds. He says to him, you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. In other words, Peter, you're not gripped by God's agenda, the concerns of God. You're gripped by the concerns of human beings. And Jesus opens Peter's heart and mind here. And he's doing it for us as well. Because we ask the question here, am I allowing myself to be gripped by God's concerns?

[13:06] Or are human-centered, world-centered concerns loosening the grip that God has on you? Is that happening to you? Peter was gripped by this desire to be, uh, for worldly power, to be great. And for Jesus to be great too. To be great in the world's eyes. Uh, it's a very human desire. And it's the desire that Satan tempted Jesus with as well. But God's agenda for Jesus is the polar opposite. He is a suffering servant. He is the all-powerful king who comes not to be served, but to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many. That's God's agenda. And the question that we ask ourselves is, how does God loosen our grip? How does God loosen the grip that the world has on us, that the human-centered concerns might have on us? And release us to be gripped by God's concerns? Well, Psalm 19 helps us with this. And I want to read two verses from it. Because King David in Psalm 19 talks about how God renews our hearts and our minds and our souls. How he gives us God's agenda. And very simply,

God does it as we feed on his word. So Psalm 19, verse 7 says, the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. He says, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. And then the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

And then the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Not just our physical eyes, but the eyes of our hearts. And righteous altogether. You see, King David knew with all his heart that as we feed on God's word every day, God revives our souls. He makes our minds wise.

He brings joy to our hearts. Jesus enlightens us in a world that is very dark in their understanding of God. And we need this because our thoughts are not God's thoughts. We're not naturally like God's thoughts. God speaks really directly through Isaiah in Isaiah 55. And he says, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. You see, God needs to grip us with his truth as we hear his thoughts and as we see his ways in his word.

And in doing that, God, as we read and as we hear, God frees us. He frees us to follow Jesus instead of stand in his way as Peter was doing. Even when it goes against all worldly wisdom. God transforms our hearts and our minds as he speaks to us. He releases us in this way to have an interior life, our heart and mind and soul that is shaped by his cross. And that brings us to the third and the final powerful implication of Jesus being the suffering Messiah for us. Because not only does Jesus suffer to save us and give us this blueprint, not only does he invite us to be gripped by God's agenda as we hear his word, but thirdly, he invites us to sacrifice and suffer for him so that our exterior life that is seen by everybody is shaped by that cross of Jesus. And so Jesus says these words that are very challenging. Jesus told the disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Now that is not the way of the world. It's not our natural inclination.

[17 : 23] In fact, there might be a very visceral response to that. We've just entered into a federal election campaign, which I'm sure you're all following very, very carefully. And can you imagine that if one of the candidates campaigned by saying, if you vote for me, I can promise you that you will deny yourself and suffer for my sake for four years in my next term. How many votes would that candidate get?

But Jesus is telling us very practically that the only way that your life is going to be cross-shaped is to deny yourself and sacrifice for him. In fact, we're going to be saying that, we're going to be committing ourselves to that in the communion service. What we say at the end of the service, and I hope you really think about these words, it's actually, why don't you turn there to page 11, third paragraph from the bottom. And this is quite a commitment that we make, but that comes from this verse. It says, here we offer and present to you, O Lord, ourselves, our souls, and our bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto you. And that's because of what Jesus says here. He says, this is how you live a cross-shaped life. We are committing ourselves as we leave this service to live that kind of life. And if we want to boil it down, what it means to deny ourself and to take up our cross, it means to glorify Jesus in every way we can, even if it's in very, very costly ways. One of the books that I was reading this week in preparation for this is from a pastor who lives a single and celibate life in a world that is just saturated with sexuality. And he said, he said that he was, he has been deeply encouraged in his life of faithfulness by the costly obedience of Christians in his church. He said it's been one of the biggest things for him that have strengthened him. And he said this, he said, some of my church's mission partners have sacrificed an easy life in the UK for a hard life as student workers in Greece and Japan out of obedience to the great commission because of God's word. A good friend has been willing to sacrifice his professional reputation to take a stand for truth because of his conviction that God wants his people to always tell the truth. And another friend, he said, persevered in a marriage that nearly everyone would have walked away from because he knew that God hates divorce. And then finally he said, a colleague rejected a promising academic career to work for our church because she believes that that's how God is asking her to use her gifts. You see, all of these people have said in different ways in their life that I present my life as a living sacrifice to you, God. I want to glorify Jesus in costly ways. And all of these people were a profound help in helping this pastor to follow

Jesus in a costly way as well. And those are challenging words for me. They're challenging words for you too because there is a certain loss that all of these people experienced because of Jesus, because of their obedience to God's word. And we in our society have been very conditioned to say that short-term happiness, you know, our self-expression and self-fulfillment is the highest good. This is the thing that we have to go after. But if something leads to unhappiness or any kind of suffering or loss, it must be wrong. We've all taken on this great value of our culture to a certain extent. It infects us. And Jesus brings the cure to that. He turns that thinking upside down for each of us by calling us to a life of costly grace that reflects in some way his costly grace for us.

He says, when you deny the worship of self, which is your great idol, and live in sacrificial ways for him, there is a cost. But there is grace too. There's a far greater grace in that you will find your greatest good. Look at verse 25. He says, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. You see, it's a loving invitation. Jesus wants us to have real life. He's not saying be stoic and accept evil or abuse. He's not saying here, forget yourself and ignore possibilities and pretend that you're not there. That's not Christianity. That's Buddhism. He wants you to save your life. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? He's saying your soul is worth everything. He wants to show you how to gain your life and not to lose it. Five chapters before,

Jesus gave a very famous invitation, a loving invitation. And we hear it every communion service. He says, come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon me and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke, that burden God gives us, and my burden is light. You see, Jesus is giving a joyful burden here.

[23 : 32] It's not about a life seeking ways to give things up and to take on suffering. It's a life of embracing Jesus and living like him and for him. And there will be a type of cost to it. I interviewed a Nigerian pastor at the nine o'clock service, and I said, are there ways your church is suffering? And he talked about the physical persecution that many churches are experiencing. Well, that's part of what it means for them to carry their cross and stand for Jesus. It will look different for us here.

But all of it means for those people in Nigeria and us too, that very simply, it is a life of embracing Jesus and living like him and for him. So when you carve out time in your busy schedule to serve Jesus in his church and have regular times of prayer and Bible reading that might be costly, you share the very life of Jesus, which is grace. You may enter into friendship with somebody, which I'd love to have you do, who are new to the church for a period of time and say, I'm going to be committed to this person, get to know them.

It's costly because of our schedules, but the grace is that you develop a relationship that is good for you and good for that person you are with. It blesses them and their life in Christ. When you give sacrificially of your money for Jesus' work in the world, there is a joining in his work, but there's also a deep thanksgiving at knowing that all good things come from his hand. When you pray for people that you know and love who don't know Jesus, you take on Jesus' heart for them. You share in the sorrow that Jesus has at them not responding, and you share in the joy that Jesus has when they do respond with faith. You see, in this way, your life as you are giving in the way that Jesus says sacrificially, your life becomes more cross-shaped.

You become more and more like your king. And so I want to very briefly close with two promises at the end of this chapter because they are a deep encouragement for us. The first one, very simply, is if you look at verse 27, it says there that 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. And what that tells us is, number one, we will see Jesus face to face in all of his glory, and he will vindicate all of that costly sacrifice for his sake in this world. There will be reward for us, and we will know his glory. We will know that it was all worth living for him. We will have seen that we have received true life from him. We will receive an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs any suffering that we have experienced because of following Jesus. And the second part of that promise is in verse 28. It says, truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in the kingdom. That's a very difficult verse to understand because every, I think every commentator I read on that had something different to say about that. But clearly it's saying that the Son, Jesus the Son, comes into his kingdom in this world, in the lifetime of the people who are there, the disciples who are there. And what that tells us is that Jesus reigns because he rose from the dead and he ascended into heaven. He is our living Messiah and King. And so that Jesus, the risen Lord, as you live the sacrificial life, strengthens you. He is with you. His promise at the end of Matthew is, lo, I am with you to the end of the age. He strengthens you by his Holy Spirit. His living presence is in your life. You suffer with him. You rejoice with him. And that is our great strength. So may you know the living presence of Jesus as he shapes your life inwardly and outwardly to be cross-shaped like his is by the power of his Holy Spirit. Amen.