

Matthew 16:21-28; Romans 12:9-21; Exodus 3:7-12

Central Point: Because the crucified and risen Christ has shown us God's mercy, he forms us into a holy people who refuse to mirror the evil around us and overcome evil with good. [Slide 2]

OPENER: The Right Christ, the Wrong Way

Friends, last Sunday we stood with Jesus and the disciples near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

[Slide 3] It was the right confession. That was a Great Confession... But today Matthew continues the conversation, and Peter discovers that he still has the wrong understanding of what the Messiah will do. The truth Peter spoke with his mouth now had to govern his feet.

Last week we asked, “Who is Jesus?” This week we must ask, “What kind of Messiah is he—and what kind of people does he form?”

If you have your Bible, turn to Matthew chapter 16. If you didn't bring your Bible, grab a Pew Bible in front of you and let's **Read Matthew 16:21-28 (Jesus Predicts His Death):**

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.

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

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.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 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? 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.”

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

[Matthew 16:25 The Greek word means either life or soul; also in verse 26.]

The words of God for the people of God (Praise be to God).

Introduction: Get Behind Me [Slide 4]

Jesus tells the disciples plainly that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day. **Peter seems to hear the cross so loudly... That he misses the resurrection.** He takes Jesus aside and begins to correct him: “*Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!*” (Matthew 16:22).

Peter loves Jesus. He may believe he is protecting Jesus. But he wants a Messiah whose road can be redirected around suffering. He wants the kingdom without the cross.

Jesus answers, “**Get behind me, Satan!**” (Matthew 16:23).

Those are severe words but notice the direction within them. Peter has stepped in front of Jesus and tried to lead him onto **Peter's** preferred road. Jesus tells him to get behind—and then speaks of anyone who would come after him.

Now get this: Peter has confessed the right Christ, but he is still resisting the way of Christ. And sometimes we do the same. **We want Jesus to save us, but we would also like to choose the road...** Right? Would it not be easier? We want mercy without surrender, resurrection without the cross, and discipleship without losing control. We have heard all this before, but were you listening...?

[Slide 5] Self-denial is not self-hatred. Jesus is not telling us to erase the person God created, remain where we are being abused, or pretend evil is harmless. To deny ourselves is to surrender the right to make ourselves lord. It is to take our hands off the life we have been trying to control and place it in the hands of Christ. Peter had the right confession, but now that confession had to govern his feet. He had to stop asking Jesus to follow Peter's preferred road and return to his proper place—behind Jesus.

MAIN POINT: Mercy Does Not Become What Wounded It [Slide 6]

Jesus does not ask his disciples to walk a road he refuses to walk. He goes to Jerusalem. He bears our sin, confronts the violence of the world, and does not return it. He gives himself, is laid in the grave, and rises on the third day.

[Slide 7]

The cross reveals the shape of God's mercy. Jesus does not call evil good. He names hypocrisy, protects the vulnerable, and speaks the truth. Yet the hatred directed toward him does not determine what flows from him. Evil wounds him, but evil does not remake him in its image.

This is the Gospel of God: in Jesus Christ, mercy confronts evil without becoming evil. The risen Christ pours out his Spirit to form that same cross-shaped life in us. Holiness is Christ's mercy so deeply formed in us that, even when we are wounded, evil does not determine what flows from us.

Mercy does not become what wounded it.

And this is where taking up the cross becomes very practical. What does life look like when self-protection, retaliation, and the need to win are no longer lord? Paul shows us in Romans 12.

Read Romans 12:9-21, Love in Action [Slide 8]

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[a] Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[b] says the Lord.²⁰ On the contrary:

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^[c]
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12:16 Or willing to do menial work

Romans 12:19 Deut. 32:35

Romans 12:20 Prov. 25:21,22

TAKE-AWAY: What Cross-Shaped Mercy Looks Like

Romans 12 is still governed by the opening words of the chapter: "in view of God's mercy" (Romans 12:1). Paul is not handing us a disconnected list of impossible virtues. He is showing us what a life transformed by mercy looks like under pressure.

[Slide 9] Love without pretending. Hate what is evil and cling to what is good. Honor one another. Share with those in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Refuse pride. Do not repay evil for evil. Pursue peace where peace is possible. Feed the enemy rather than become the enemy.

[Slide 10] Then Paul gathers everything into one sentence: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

This is not sentimental niceness. Sincere love hates evil. Christian mercy may tell the truth, establish a boundary, leave an unsafe room, call for help, and protect someone who is vulnerable. But it refuses to let another person's sin dictate our character.

Peace is not always possible, because peace involves more than one person. Paul himself says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). Faithfulness is always possible, because faithfulness begins with what Christ is forming in us.

When someone is angry, we do not have to borrow their anger. When someone is reactive, we do not have to be pulled into the same reactivity. We may remain connected, truthful, and responsible without surrendering the person Christ is forming us to become.

CONCLUDING: I Will Be with You

[Slide 11] That kind of life cannot be sustained by human determination alone.

At the burning bush, God tells Moses, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt” (Exodus 3:7). God has heard their cries. God is concerned about their suffering. God comes down to deliver them—and then sends Moses.

Moses asks, “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11). God does not answer by praising Moses' ability. He answers, “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12).

Before God calls us to do something, God calls us to Someone. Paul Anderson reminds us that God's answer to Moses is not a technique but the gift of presence; from that presence, strength and faithful action flow.¹

[Slide 12] Isaac Penington described the daily cross as the Spirit of Christ subduing within us whatever is contrary to God, until holiness, meekness, patience, and love become the fruit of a renewed life.² This is sanctifying grace. Christ does not merely restrain our retaliation. He changes what flows from the heart.

Holy Response and Open Worship

[Slide 13] Friends, where do you need to get behind Jesus again?

What wound is in danger of determining what flows from you?

Perhaps someone has injured you, disappointed you, frightened you, or kept pulling you toward anger. Christ is not asking you to call the wound good. He is inviting you to place the wound beneath his cross so that it does not become your master.

You may need to speak truth. You may need a boundary. You may need to make peace where peace is possible—or release the revenge that has been keeping the conflict alive inside you.

As we enter Open Worship, let this query remain before us:

What wound is in danger of determining what flows from me?

Lord Jesus, bring us behind you again. Let your mercy enter the places that still ache. Form in us a love that is sincere, a courage that names evil, and a holiness that refuses to be overcome by it.

Mercy arrived first.

Mercy became visible.

Mercy formed us into a people.

And now, behind Jesus, mercy becomes cross-shaped.

Mercy does not become what wounded it.

Mercy overcomes evil with good. [Slide 14]

[Pause and enter the silence.]

Notes

1. Paul N. Anderson, “A Theology of Presence,” *Evangelical Friend* (1993): 4, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/312>.

2. Isaac Penington, “Concerning the Cross of Christ,” in *Selections and Letters from the Works of Isaac Penington*, ed. John Barclay (London: Darton and Harvey, 1837), 133-34.