

Text: Matthew 16:21-28

Theme: Get behind me, Satan!

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the sixteenth chapter verses twenty-one through twenty-eight.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well today. What do I have here? I have some salt. There is an old belief that if you spill salt, then the devil is trying to tempt you. So you take some salt and throw it behind your left shoulder and throw salt in his eyes to blind him from tempting you. In our text for today, we see Jesus call Peter Satan. Why does Jesus call him that? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Christ calls Peter, who just Him the Son of the living God, Satan, why? What's going on?

Peter just a few verses before, which we looked at last week Sunday, boldly and faithfully called Jesus the Christ, Son of the living God when asked who Jesus is. Now our Lord expounds on what being the Christ means. It means that Jesus will go to Jerusalem, go to people that are seeking to kill him. There He will be killed and raise again from the dead. Peter, perhaps to defend our Lord's honor, attempts to pull Jesus aside and swears that this should never happen to Jesus. Peter does this because he has in mind the things of man, not God. He attempts to honor Jesus by denying the cross. He attempts to give Jesus glory by avoiding the cross. Peter's idea of what the Christ is and does, has no room for a crucified Savior.

Our Lord's response? "Get behind me, Satan." Satan, the disciple who just confessed Jesus as the Christ is now called Satan! Can you imagine the shock on Peter's face. The look of pain and anguish? He is struck mute at our Lord's rebuke. We are not given Peter's response, if he could even give one. He is called out by our Lord because He should be focusing on things of God rather than on the things of men. Why does our Lord do this? Because Peter is thinking like the devil. As Polycarp, one of the early church bishops, and one of Saint John's disciples, once wrote, "For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an anti-Christ, and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection nor judgment,—this man is the first-born of Satan."¹ Jesus incarnation, cross, resurrection, and return for judgment; all go together. Take out one and you are no longer with Jesus but against Him.

¹ [□](#) Clement I, P., Ignatius, S., Bishop of Antioch, Polycarp, S., Bishop of Smyrna, & Lake, K. (1912–1913). *The Apostolic Fathers*. (K. Lake, Ed.) (Vol. 1, p. 293). Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press.

Don't always like to focus on things of God

How quickly does our sinful nature focus upon the things of men? We love to focus on the things of men and worldly things. We very easily become theologians of glory. A theologian of glory is one who seeks to **minimize difficult and painful things, or to move past them rather than looking them square in the face and accepting them.** We look to what we can do ourselves rather than to the ways of God. This type of theology is all over our world today. You can avoid suffering, you can avoid pain and grief. You can have the best and brightest Television, the best car, the better wife or husband. You can have the best health. You can have more money in your bank account. All you have to do is work harder, be smarter, believe more strongly. If you do not have all of these things then you are at fault. That is what the world says. The world prefers the joyful Christ, who goes around telling good parables and healing every disease and sickness.

When what we really need is the things of God. The Christ that we need is the One who has nailed scarred hands. The one who says, "I know that you can do nothing on your own." The one who says, "I have done everything necessary for your salvation already. It is finished." A theology of glory quickly fades away when the struggles of life become harsh. When the mother's joy at a new birth change to cries of anguish over life turned to death. When the doctor comes back with the test results and tells you that you have cancer that is spreading and there's nothing that they can do. When you are hated by the world, abused, and persecuted merely for saying that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. What then do you do? Believe more in yourself? No, you run to what Jesus has done for you upon His cross as you bear your own. You become a theologian of the cross. **A theologian of the cross accepts the difficult thing rather than immediately trying to change it or use it. It looks directly into pain, and "calls a thing what it is" instead of calling evil good and good evil.**

Crosses

In the midst of pain and suffering, you do not deny that it occurs, nor do you try to explain it away with pleasant sounding platitudes. Rather you call it the evil that it is, even if it comes from beloved friends and family members. You say, "That is horrible that it happened, I am here for you to help you. Let's take it to God our Father in prayer and ask for His mercy, strength, and comfort." You carry your cross, whatever it may be, following the One who took up His own cross, bearing it to Golgotha. There, bearing the mockery of the scribes and pharisees, bearing the full wrath of God, that He can indeed say, "All your pain and anguish is removed. There will come a Day when this vale of tears and sorry will be no more. Until then, stand firm in my love and forgiveness."

That simply is what we do. When Satan tempts us to follow our own desires or the desires of the world, when despair and grief threaten to overwhelm us. We deny them, clinging fast to Christ and the plan of God that He laid out. He spared not His own Son but it was necessary for Jesus to suffer, die, and rise again for our salvation. That death, Satan, sin, everything has been crushed and we can indeed bear the pain and grief of this world, looking

forward to the better world to come in the life everlasting. That just as our Lord suffered, died, and rose from the dead, so too will we.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.