

“Hindering or Helping Jesus”

(Matthew 16:21-23)

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

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 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 your Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his 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 he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Dear friends in Jesus,

The waters that tumble down the mountains cut through the lands in their race to the sea, and they invariably seek out the path of least resistance. They follow the darkest and deepest valleys as they avoid the sunlit hills. It is only when human wisdom and effort take a hand in building tunnels, lakes and dams here and there, making waters go where they never ran, that dry areas will blossom into rich pastures and prosperity. We think immediately of the Snowy Mountains Project and the influence it has had on dry areas of south eastern Australia.

After nearly three years with Jesus, the greatest teacher ever, Peter stood up one day, and with remarkable insight made the 'great confession' of who Jesus really was. 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Because Jesus had refused to be acclaimed as an earthly king, and had withdrawn to the quieter areas of Galilee, the people there accepted him as a prophet and friend, and there was no danger here for his safety.

But when Jesus announced his decision to return to Jerusalem, there to suffer and die and be raised again, Peter literally jumped to his feet and chastised Jesus, 'Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned to Peter and with sternness in his voice said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block (hindrance) to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men? Hindering Jesus was not something unique to Peter; we have also done it over and over again.

What good is it if we possess the only known disinfectant to the poison of sin and do not use it? What good is it if you are a good swimmer but refuse to help a drowning person who cannot swim? What good is a plan of saving us if there were no Jesus dying for our sins on Calvary's cross, because Peter or you tried to hinder Jesus? Let us get rid of all our excuses, all of them bad, and go forward as Peter did after the day of Pentecost, telling others what Jesus has done for them so they can be saved. Let's open our hearts and minds and discover what God has placed in them, and then let's share what we have with others.

While it is important to use what we have of our knowledge of the Bible, it is also vital and urgent to increase that knowledge. Read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John over and over again, so that our relationship and love for Jesus may grow and increase.

When Paul was in his last year and now spending it in prison in Rome, he wrote to Timothy and asked him to bring his cloak from Troas to keep him warm. He also tells Timothy to bring the 'parchments', especially the 'parchments'. Above everything else Paul wanted the comfort and the encouragement of God's Word.

Is your Bible well-worn or is it well kept? Does it show the evidence of your spiritual travels? Many of you purchase a daily newspaper with very little good news in it. Or some of you subscribe to magazines or read books from the Library. Wouldn't it be wonderful to join the Daily Book Club, that is the Bible. Put your eyes and ears to it and hear and see people sob and sigh. Read its victorious chapters how Jesus has overcome all sobbing and sighing so that you can walk with fellow Christians each day. Join them and share the suffering death and victorious resurrection of Jesus.

An elderly man lost a talented daughter in a sudden death. His pastor gave him some comforting Bible verses. After a time he found himself at peace with Jesus. He would often spread these Bible verses out on his table. 'Spread' is right because many of them had disintegrated into small pieces. He read that Jesus was his Comforter, and therefore he would not let his heart be troubled any more. He felt doubly assured when he read Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Often we hinder Jesus by our lack of **prayer**. In Acts 2:42 we are told how the early Christians persisted in Biblical teaching, fellowship and prayer. Jesus frequently prayed to his heavenly Father. In the book of James we are told, 'You do not have because you do not ask.' Jesus invites us to "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." You can pray likewise Solomon in the great Temple or you can pray like the humble publican also in the Temple. You can pray in your youth like Samuel or in your old age like Simeon. How peace is multiplied, how joy is increased, how faith is strengthened as we increase our talks with God!

Peter would want all people to know that only Jesus could forgive him, when he tried to stop Jesus going on his sad road to the Cross, that only Jesus could bring the Holy Spirit into Peter's heart and life, so that after Jesus' ascension he could tell others about Jesus as Saviour and Friend, regardless of suffering and persecution; and that only Jesus could command Peter to write two wonderful letters to Christians in exile. In them Peter calls his Lord 'precious' and what was shed at Calvary he calls 'precious blood', our only means of salvation. We can now say with Paul in the words of Galatians 2:20, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. **Amen**.

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

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck 30 August 2020