

Matthew 16:1-28.

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Who is Jesus? If we were to ask that question of people on a street corner, we would certainly receive a variety of answers. If we are in the “Bible belt” of America, we would often find answers that are similar to the biblical message, though most would present a testimony that is based upon what they have heard, rather than what they know. Most of these would probably preface their answer by making it clear that they do not go “to church.” Most of the people we meet on the street will be either ignorant of the true nature of Jesus Christ, or will have replaced the truth of His nature with a model of their own design, or one of a religious group with which they affiliate. Most will agree that they believe in an historical Jesus, that He was a very good man, and a very good teacher who brought a very good message of love and tolerance.

Only those who have placed their faith and trust in Him as their personal Savior and LORD, will testify to His identity as YAHWEH, the Son of God, the LORD and prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament. This is simply because such a testimony comes only from submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.¹ To all others, those who make up the profound majority of God’s created people such a belief is considered foolishness.² Instead of seeking God where He may already be found,³ they have created their own definition of Jesus, and their own definition of their god, often using a model that satisfies their own desire for understanding rather than that which has already been set forth by the True and Living God of Creation, the one who created them for fellowship with Himself, a fellowship they have rejected.

The greatest impediment to the understanding of the true nature of God is religion itself. Religions are models of belief that have been established by man in their attempt to fill their spiritual need, to fill that created “God-shaped hole”⁴ that God breathed⁵ into their spirit that only He can fill. However, because of their rejection of the truth of the gospel and the true nature of Jesus Christ that is represented in it, that hole is never quite filled.

As we study the historical narratives of the Biblical scriptures, we find that the LORD revealed Himself to Israel through Abraham with the purpose that He and his descendants would love Him, serve Him through that love, and communicate

¹ John 6:44.

² 1 Corinthians 1:18-23.

³ 1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 15:2, 19:3; Proverbs 7:15; Isaiah 55:6.

⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Penses* 10.148, c. 1660.

⁵ Genesis 2:7.

the good news of His grace to the lost world. Those who are engaged in that work today include many Jews who came to faith in the LORD as well as the community of Christians around the world. However, it was those who were so steeped in Jewish tradition who did not understand their own prophecies and did not recognize the Messiah when He came. Even when Jesus stood before them, fulfilling all their prophecies, they could not overcome their prejudiced presuppositions. They simply could not recognize the LORD.

THE BLINDNESS OF SOCIETY'S ELITE

Matthew 16:1. *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.*

Presuppositions can serve as overwhelming impediments to the truth. Unable to accept Jesus for who He is, the religious leadership sought to discredit Jesus' claim by demanding that He would perform a miracle for them. Unable to recognize the LORD, they held to their presumed authority over all spiritual matters in the community of Israel. Their demand was an assertion of that authority, demanding that Jesus give them proof of who He claimed to be.

We may be tempted to find it easy to be critical of the behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees, but "asking for signs" before one will make a decision is a common error, even among those who profess faith in the LORD. We often want proof of something before we will act. Unfortunately, a demand for proof is in direct opposition to faith. We will never please God when we look for signs rather than make our choices based upon a heart and mind that are submitted to the LORD.⁶

Matthew 16:2-3. *He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. ³And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

Those who reject the nature and identity of Christ are not necessarily unintelligent. They are often the most studied of people, are not lacking in knowledge, and certainly this was true of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Not only were they studied in their traditions and their understanding of the Hebrew scriptures, they were among the most learned in most areas of the educational enterprise. Often it is the most learned and educated people in society that cannot accept God's message of grace.

⁶ Hebrews 11:6.

There is a dramatic and mortal difference between religious knowledge and spiritual discernment. This criticism of the religious leadership focuses on their intense and intentional study of those things that they willingly accept, and the rejection of any effort of attaining knowledge in those areas that they reject. This is a form of hypocrisy. We see hypocrisy when people's minds are so "made up" that they refuse to even listen to an alternative position. Consequently, such people are professing to be educated and wise in all things, but are in truth purposely focused on a very narrow field of thought.

Spiritual discernment comes from faith in God and an effort to know Him and His purposes as described by Scriptures and revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 16:4. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.*

Jesus describes those who demand a sign from God as both wicked and adulterous. Their wickedness is demonstrated in their hatred for that which is truly Godly. We witness that today in the way so many "learned" people actively reject, marginalize, and persecute Christians, believing their message to be anything but the truth. The adulterousness of the religious leadership is demonstrated in their apostasy: chosen and called by God to love Him and share Him with the world, they have rejected Him and replaced him with another authority in life, in this case the set of Jewish religious traditions concerning the Law of Moses. Faith in God has been entirely replaced by a faithless religion formed by the opinions of man. The means of finding righteousness has been determined by the opinions of man.

If Jesus had decided to "perform" some form of miracle in the presence of the religious leaders, it would have accomplished nothing. They are so set in their beliefs that, observing something beyond their ability to explain, they would simply rationalize some form of explanation. They are incapable of changing a religious dogma that has been programmed into them from childhood through twelve hundred years, 42 generations, of Israelite apostasy.

However, Jesus does indicate that there will be a sign given to the apostate people of Israel, as was also given to all who have lived since Jesus was born: the sign of Jonah. When people think of Jonah the most common part of the story that they remember is the miracle of Jonah's salvation: buried at sea in the "belly" of the leviathan, only to be "resurrected," spewed out on the shore three days later. Jesus is declaring the experience of Jonah to serve as an archetype to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that would soon take place. Still,

when the resurrection event took place the religious leadership still would not believe, even when the risen Christ was seen by hundreds of people who quickly testified to their experience. Jesus only revealed Himself after the resurrection to people who had faith in Him prior to His death. Had He revealed Himself to the religious leadership they still would have missed the sign, summarily dismissing His presence by arguing that He never actually died on the Cross of Calvary.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY'S ELITE

Matthew 16:5-6. *And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. ⁶Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

By the time that Jesus and the disciples had left their encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees it was getting late in the day, they had been traveling north along the shore of Galilee towards Caesarea, and as the disciples were becoming hungry they were aware that they had not brought any bread with them. It is quite evident that this was the topic of discussion when Jesus interrupted their conversation with this interjection concerning the “Leaven of the Pharisees.”

The Israelites had strict and enforced guidelines concerning the use of leaven, or yeast, in the making of bread. The preparing and/or consumption of bread that contained yeast was forbidden on the Sabbath.⁷ The idea was that leaven, because of the way it affects bread, served as a metaphor for sin. Just as a little leaven changes the nature and character of bread, sin changes the nature and character of the person.

The religious elite were the most influential people in the Jewish community. Their influence was obtained and maintained both through tradition and through political power. When people sought to learn about their “faith” they would go to the Pharisees and Sadducees for teaching. Those who would seek to be part of the influential community would train under the Pharisees. Consequently, these served as the primary educational resource for the nation, a resource that was entirely devoid of any understanding of the true nature of God. The power that the religious leadership had to draw people away from Jesus was insidious.

Consequently, the teachings of the “elite” must always be received with wisdom and discernment. The teaching of the Pharisees would only serve to lead people away from the LORD and into a rejection of Him, the most powerful function of

⁷ Exodus 12:15.

sin. Jesus is literally advising the disciples that they should avoid the “sin” of the Pharisees. They are not to fall under their sinful influence.

Likewise, we experience the same pattern in the political, social, and scientific “elite” today who have all forms of rationalization that they employ to denigrate the Christian message and reject the true nature of Christ. It is not appropriate that Christians give these people any spiritual authority in their lives.

THE INFLUENCE OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Matthew 16:7-8. *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.*

Of course, the disciples have been conversing about their hunger and their lack of bread. It is likely that they were complaining that they were going to go hungry. So, when they heard Jesus’ words, they missed the metaphor, dismissing the content or context of Jesus’ words. Their minds were still distracted by their hunger. They were focused on their circumstances rather than on the presence and power of Jesus.

People of faith today can become similarly distracted as they are bombarded by the secular messages of the modern “elite.” We can become so immersed in our circumstances that we fail to hear the “still small voice” of the Holy Spirit as He speaks truth to those who will listen with discernment. Like the disciples on that road to Caesarea, we can easily be so focused on our circumstances that we do not hear the words of the LORD who is speaking to us.

Matthew 16:8-10. *Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? ⁹Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? ¹⁰Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?*

There is no doubt that the disciples were becoming very concerned about where their next meal was coming from, as they “reasoned among” themselves concerning their lack of bread. Their concern was so great that they completely missed the instruction that Jesus was giving them. Their minds were not in a place where they were listening to the LORD. Consequently, Jesus first gave them a gentle reprimand concerning the lack of faith they were demonstrating in their discussion. After all, they were witnesses to Jesus’ ability to feed them. There is no reason for them to be worrying about bread.

Matthew 16:11-12. *How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? ¹²Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

Having just left a debate with the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus' statement concerning them is important. As the religious leadership of Israel, the disciples had been trained to respect them and to accept their teaching without question. Until Jesus came there was no considerable resistance to this cultural standard. Now that Jesus has come, He has been exposing their hypocrisy and their lack of true faith in God. Though their minds were on their hunger, it did not take the disciples long to understand Jesus' statement when He made it clear to them that He was talking of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus' point is simple. The doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees which had been heretofore accepted without question Jesus is now describing as "leaven," a symbol for the sin that has the power to change the very nature of the individual who is under its control. Jesus is instructing the disciples to listen carefully to what the Pharisees and Sadducees are teaching, doing so with the understanding that much of their message is false. To beware of something is to be wary of the threat of danger that something poses. Jesus' statement is contrary to everything that they had been taught concerning their religious leadership, so for the disciples to respond positively would require from them a sincere faith and belief that Jesus is who He says He is since He is literally "pulling rank" on that leadership.

The message of the gospel is in direct conflict with the message of this evil, secular, and pagan world. For one to accept the message of the gospel, they must turn from much of what they believed in before hearing the gospel of grace. To do this the gospel must be given an authority greater than the messages and mores of this world, and Jesus must be given primacy over all its people. Consequently, upon showing the disciples the sinful hypocrisy of the religious leadership, He asks them a series of very important questions:

THE TRUE IDENTITY OF JESUS

Matthew 16:13. *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

Referring to Himself as the “Son of Man,”⁸ Jesus asked the disciples who do the people think He is. Again, they had just left the debate with the Pharisees, and their opinions of Jesus’ identity were certainly varied. If we were to ask this question of people today we would, likewise, receive a range of answers. The fact of an historical Jesus is not controversial; there are very few who hold that Jesus is simply a character in a mythological story. However, only Christians hold that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, who is YAHWEH incarnate, the eternal Christ who was the agent of creation, the source of true righteousness, and is the judge of all. Others usually will state that Jesus was a great teacher or prophet with a wonderful message of love and tolerance. Many profess to “believe” in Jesus, but they deny one or more of His true traits so that it suits their actual belief system. This denial is the basis of the many Christian cults that thrive all around the world.

Matthew 16:14. *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

It would be unusual for anyone to day to think that a person is literally the reincarnation of another person from history. However, this was a common belief among the ancients. For example, the Jews believed that Elijah was coming back and to this day they often set an additional place setting at their Sabbath meal with hopes that He comes to visit. People saw in Jesus the work and message of John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets.

Matthew 16:15. *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

Of all the questions that Jesus could ask, this is the most important one that all people must answer. God created mankind to have a relationship with Him, to place their faith and trust in Him, and through that faith and trust, develop a growing love for Him and a desire to be obedient to His purpose for their lives as revealed through the Word of God as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. God’s promise to the people of His creation has never changed: He will bring to Himself all who place their faith and trust in Him, blessing them, and providing a place for them with Him in eternity.

However, we have a problem of sin that separates us from the realization of that promise. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus is YAHWEH, Jehovah who came to earth through the Baby Jesus, born into the lowest, most humble situation that existed in ancient Israel, to (1) bring us clarification of God’s promise for salvation, and (2) to die on the Cross of Calvary to pay the sin debt for all who

⁸ The title , “Son of Man” was understood by traditional Jews to be the prophetic name for Ezekiel, as he was referred to by this title in the Old Testament book named for him no less than 94 times.

place their faith and trust in Him. Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, and through Him all who have placed their faith in God can be saved, from the days of Adam through the end of the age.

Most people reject this description of Jesus, and by so doing, reject the free gift of salvation that He died on the Cross for. Consequently, the answer to this question is the most important one that all people will ever choose: choose faith in Jesus Christ and spend eternity secure with the LORD in heaven, or reject Jesus and spend eternity separated from Him with satan and all his demons.

Most people simply dismiss this characteristic of Jesus, in hopes that there is some other means by which they can avoid separation from God for eternity.

Matthew 16:16. *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

When we observe the nature of the twelve disciples that were closest to Jesus, we often find Simon Peter (who until this moment in his life was named Simon/Simeon Bar Jona) to be the first to act and the first to speak. This extrovert and confident nature would serve him well after the resurrection of Jesus Christ when he would dedicate his life to the preaching and teaching of the good news that Jesus came to share. Like other similar situations, this one was no different: it seems that Peter spoke first, and did so with confidence.

Peter's response to the question was simple: "You are the Messiah,⁹⁹ the Son of the Living God." Peter demonstrated to Jesus and to the other apostles the first step to salvation: the sincere belief that Jesus is who He says He is. Unlike those of us who must learn of Jesus through the biblical narrative and through those who teach it, Peter had spent three years with Jesus and witnessed His work among the people as He taught the gospel message, and performed many miracles, particularly miracles of healing. Peter's response was sincere and confident.

Matthew 16:17. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

In agreement with the scriptures, Jesus stated that Peter's understanding of the true nature of Jesus did not come from the teaching of man, but from the Father who is in Heaven. The Father reveals Himself to mankind through the work of

⁹⁹ "Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word, "Messiah." The Jews refer to Jesus as "Jesus Messiah," or "Y'shua Meshiach."

the Holy Spirit, and through Jesus, the Messiah. One of the reasons why it is so hard for people to come to a saving knowledge of Christ is that they receive all of their teaching from worldly authorities, secular and religious systems of thought. These systems all reject the truth of the Gospel and lack the power to bring people to salvation. Only the Holy Spirit can break through to our hearts and draw us to God.¹⁰

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Matthew 16:18. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

This may be one of the more misunderstood verses in the New Testament. Peter has just demonstrated true faith in the LORD, Jesus Christ. Jesus recognized this change in Simon Bar Jona's life by first giving him the surname, "Peter." This word is "Cephas," or "Kephas" in the Greek and is the word for a small stone that is used in the building of a wall or building.¹¹ Jesus then refers to "this rock," which refers to the foundation stone of the building. The Greek grammar links these statements together such that the "rock" is a reference to the faith that Peter demonstrated. It is on the foundation of faith that the church is built. Some misunderstand the connection between these two verses and hold that the foundation of the church is Peter. However, Peter clearly teaches in his letters that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ.

It may be important to note that Jesus is referring to Peter's faith by His knowledge of what it will become, not necessarily of where it is at this moment. Peter's current words are "you are the Christ, you are the Son of the Living God." If one were to interview Satan himself, he would profess the same words. Satan knows that Jesus is the Christ, and that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. This knowledge gives Satan reason to exist in a spirit of fear.¹² The belief in the identity of Jesus is not what saves. It is placing one's faith and trust in Jesus as one's personal LORD because of that belief that saves, and it is this submission to the LORD that Peter will experience in the near future.

Matthew 16:19a. *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:*

¹⁰ John 12:32.

¹¹ Peter would later write his letters to the church and describe in detail the metaphor of how each person of faith is like a stone that is shaped and built into a wall. 1 Peter, chapter 2.

¹² James 2:19.

What is the “gift” that Peter received as a “reward” for his faith? Jesus refers to giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The metaphor of a key represents entry into something or some place that is secured against access to anyone without it. Access to the Kingdom of Heaven is not found through Peter. Access to the Kingdom of Heaven is given as a gift by the LORD to all who place their faith and trust in Him. All who have turned to the LORD in faith have full access to God through prayer and through the receipt of His blessings. One does not have to approach God through any person. Nobody stands between the true believer and the LORD. The key has been given, and the door is open.

However, the key also implies security. Access to the kingdom of God, eternal heaven, is denied to those who have not been given the key: those who go to the grave having never turned to the LORD in faith.

Matthew 16:19b. *and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

The second statement that Jesus makes concerns the new relationship and understanding that Peter (and all faithful believers) have been given as a result of a sincere profession of faith. When one comes to the LORD in faith, the Holy Spirit comes into their hearts and lives at the point of salvation, and becomes a permanent and eternal part of their spirit. When one comes to true faith and trust in the LORD the Holy Spirit is then available to the believer to inform every issue of his/her life. The Spirit is accessible in every decision that we make. Consequently, our choices, our attitudes, and our actions will be informed by the Kingdom of Heaven. When we choose to live by faith we will find ourselves in agreement with the LORD on that which is to be embraced (bound) and that which is to be rejected (loosed).¹³ Paul expresses this idea when he teaches the Romans, “Abhor that which is evil, and cling to that which is good.”¹⁴

The impetuous Peter demonstrated a pattern of confident, impulsive behavior that, when brought under the power of the Holy Spirit would lead him to serve as the leader of the Apostles, and ultimately one of the most influential personalities in the history of the church. Peter’s personality did not change at the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit into his life. His confidence and impetuosity were obvious in the years he spent with Jesus. What changed was

¹³ The writer "intends his readers to recall the words of Isa 22:22, concerning the steward Eliakim: '... I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open' ". Dahlberg, Bruce T. "Typological use of Jeremiah 1:4-19 in Matthew 16:13-23." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 94 no 1 Mar 1975, p 73-80.

¹⁴ Romans 12:9.

how his choices were informed by the Holy Spirit after he came to the LORD in faith and trust. He now saw his world through the “eyes” of the Holy Spirit.

The two promises that Jesus made to Peter in this verse are simply the promise that the LORD makes to all people who come to Him in faith.

Matthew 16:20. *Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

The scriptures do not indicate at this point in time if all of the disciples (save Judas Iscariot) had also come to believe in the identity of Jesus as had Peter. However, it is likely that they had also accepted the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This presented a small dilemma. Jesus’ ministry was on a time-table of the LORD’s plan from the point that His ministry started following His baptism by John to when it would end at the ascension following His resurrection. The Jews were expecting a different kind of Messiah, one who would free them from their bondage to a foreign government. Had Jesus’ identity become generally known, the people would have risen and promoted His ascension as their King, a civil action that would have diminished Jesus’ ability to freely travel through the region, and would have brought the authority of Rome down on the people. Known as the “Messianic Secret,” Jesus would often instruct those who recognized Him as the Messiah to refrain from spreading the news before Jesus had the opportunity to complete His work.

Matthew 16:21. *From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

Jesus’ expression of the Messianic Secret is a reasonable segue into His instruction concerning His coming passion. Jesus’ description of His passion is consistent with the conversation that He just had with the Pharisees and Sadducees when He referred to the sign of Jonah: that He would be killed and then raised again on the third day. Jesus is making it clear that, though the people think that the Messiah is a political figure who will lead them against Rome, He will never be part of any such event. He has been teaching that His Kingdom is “not of this world,”¹⁵ and it is important that the disciples understand this.

Matthew 16:21. *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.* ²³*But he*

¹⁵ John 18:36.

turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

We might be surprised by Peter's (typical) impulsive response to Jesus' words, considering that this is taking place so quickly after Peter's profession. However, this simply reminds us that Peter's faith is not yet complete. It is still based upon his profession of the identity of Jesus, yet not on a profession of faith in Him as his LORD and Savior. This would come soon enough. In the meantime, there is still more for Peter and the other disciples to learn.

Matthew 16:24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

There is much more to the nature of faith than simply professing Jesus' identity. Faith in Jesus is always demonstrated in submission to Him as one's LORD. This is where Satan's profession of Jesus' identity falls short of salvation. Satan will not, and will never, submit to Jesus Christ as LORD. Belief does not save. Faith that is founded on belief saves. To submit to the LORD is to place one's self fully under His authority. The idea of "deny himself" refers to surrendering control of one's life to the LORD. Without the LORD, we are the center of our own lives. We are our own authority, and we choose to submit to worldly authorities as we go through our days. To come to the LORD in saving faith is to step down from our own position of personal authority and give that place to Jesus. Faith does not raise Jesus up to be our "co-pilot." Faith causes us to step down and make Jesus our "pilot," the One who is given control and authority in our lives. Then, when we are submitted to Him as LORD, we will seek to follow Him in obedience. His Word becomes the most important narrative of our lives. Honoring Him becomes the most important work of our lives. To "deny" ourselves is to give the ultimate authority of our lives to Jesus.

Jesus then describes this obedience as "taking up His cross." The Cross would come to represent the fundamental purpose of Jesus' life: to atone for the sins of those who would place their faith and trust in God. All will come to God at the end of their lives and face the final judgment, but only those who have placed their faith and trust in Him will come to Him with forgiveness: all because of the Cross.

For the faithful to take up their cross is, likewise, to realize the fundamental purpose of their lives. Some have misunderstood this passage to think that the cross is some form of suffering. However, the purpose of the cross was not to suffer, it was to save. Also Jesus taught "My yoke is easy and My burden is

light.”¹⁶ A light burden is not characterized by suffering. The fundamental purpose for the life of every believer is to love the LORD and experience the blessings of that love. There are at least four areas where we take up the cross:

The Stand: the vertical shaft of the cross:

Our relationship with God. Saving faith brings with it a love-relationship with God. Before faith, we were at “enmity” with God.¹⁷ Salvation brings a relationship that is reflected in our continual worship of Him, and a continual desire to become closer to Him in that relationship. We find opportunity to carry this part of the cross in prayer, praise, and worship.

Our relationship to His Word. A desire for obedience to the LORD includes a desire to know Him better and to have a better understanding of how to live a life of obedience. The primary resource we possess to gain this understanding is the Word of God. This Word is found in the biblical narrative, from the first verse of the book of Genesis to the last verse in the book of The Revelation. We can also hear the Word of God through sound biblical preaching and teaching, through the testimony and counsel of other Christians, and through our experiences as they are illuminated by the Holy Spirit. We find opportunity to carry this part of the cross in Bible study and submission to good, sound, teaching and preaching.

The Patibulum: the horizontal shaft of the cross”

Our relationship with His People. The LORD has created us to serve Him, and to serve one another through Him. God’s plan is that He would bless those who have placed their faith and trust in Him, and He utilizes His people to minister to one another as they become part of that purpose of blessing. Faithful Christians will find a blessing when they share their lives with other Christians. Such relationships tend to multiply our joys and divide our griefs as we share one with another. Christians, moved with true love and compassion serve one another so that none would be in want. We find opportunity to carry this part of the cross in giving ourselves to the body of believers, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Our relationship with the Lost. God’s will is that all would be saved.¹⁸ People can find faith in the LORD through many different means, but the most common, the most profitable, and the most effective means is through the love and testimony of another Christian. God’s plan is that His

¹⁶ Matthew 11:29-30.

¹⁷ James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16.

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 2:4.

people would be a “nation of priests,”¹⁹ sharing the good news of God’s gift of salvation to the whole world. We find opportunity to carry this part of the cross in giving ourselves to those who need to hear and respond to the gospel.

The Cross that we carry is not a burden, but a blessing. It is a new set of relationships that are informed by the Holy Spirit, first with the LORD, and then with one another. Every attitude and action that we experience is informed by this blessing, and has the potential to bring dramatic change into our lives and the lives of those who we come into relationship with.

Matthew 16:25. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Carrying the Cross is about giving our lives away, first to the LORD and then to one another in love. Carrying the Cross does involve sacrifice as we trade our needs for the needs of others. To “save our own life” is to keep it to ourselves and fail to give it to the LORD. To choose to do so rather than give ourselves to the LORD is to ultimately lose it when we face the final judgment.

However, when we give our life to the LORD and to others we will actually find it for the first time, and will also keep it forever. Jesus illustrates that to gain all the world for ourselves gains us nothing when one is eternally lost. The eternal blessing comes from carrying the Cross.

Matthew 16:27-28. *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. ²⁸Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

Jesus’ promise of blessing comes with a promise of reward. Part of understanding Jesus’ identity was to learn of His death and resurrection. Jesus could not leave the disciples at this point in their understanding, but close the instruction with a more complete testimony to His identity, one that serves to encourage us to carry the cross. First, Jesus promises that, though His death and resurrection (and ascension) are certain, He as the ‘Son of Man’ will come again with all the Glory of the Father and will bring reward for all who seek Him.²⁰

¹⁹ 1 Peter 2:9.

²⁰ Hebrews 11:6.

God's is not a passive promise, but one that brings both temporal and eternal blessing for those who turn to Him in faith.

Also, Jesus taught the disciples that the events that He is speaking of are coming soon. Many (if not most) of those who are hearing Jesus' teaching will either experience or hear of His death and resurrection on the Cross of Calvary. Many will see Him again after the resurrection when He is in His Kingdom.

The importance of the question that Jesus posed to the disciples and poses to us cannot be understated. Who do you say that Jesus is? Is he a dead teacher, an historical prophet, or a living LORD. Is He the LORD of the Bible, or is He the LORD of your heart? The time for decision is now.