

Behold, We Go Up to Jerusalem with Jesus!

Text: Mat 16:21-28

Suggested Hymns:

T: 500, 336, 59, 282, 65

A: 500, 344, 336, 59, 65

1) That We Might Have A Deeper Appreciation
Of His Suffering, Death, And Resurrection

2) That We Might Be Encouraged to A More
Faithful Following Of Him

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 16:21-28, ²¹ *From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.* ²² *Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"* ²³ *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

²⁴ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* ²⁵ *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* ²⁶ *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* ²⁷ *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."* ²⁸ *"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. During Lent we Christians, together with many others, shall make an important journey.

It is a journey far across land and sea and back across the centuries. It will take us to an ancient city rich in tradition and highly favoured of God. It will take us to the courts of a beautiful palace of the Church High Priest. We shall

visit the court of a notorious Roman governor. We shall see many people, the vast majority of them acting in a way that is not fitting for human beings to act.

We shall follow the crowd out to a hill near the city and see a scene so terrible that the sun refuses to shine on it. But in the midst of all this mixed crowd we shall see One who is different. He is calm when everyone else is excited, truthful when others are lying, praying when others are cursing, and forgiving when others are condemning. And somehow we shall feel drawn to Him, for it is His forgiveness, love and peace that we need for our troubled hearts.

By this time you recognise this journey as our annual Lenten journey, our pilgrimage in thought to Jerusalem. During this time we meditate upon the suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In our Lenten sermons, our Lenten hymns, our readings from the history of the Passion of Christ, and our meditations, we shall go in spirit to Jerusalem. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Behold, We Go Up To Jerusalem With Jesus! That We Might Have A Deeper Appreciation Of His Suffering, Death, And Resurrection

Jesus was on His way to Caesarea Philippi with His disciples. This city was located north of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of the Lebanon Mountains. It was a beautiful spot. It was the kind of scenic place that we would want to go for a holiday. But Jesus was not taking His disciples there on a vacation. He took them out there to tell them certain things that would lead them to a fuller understanding and a deeper appreciation of His work for them and all mankind.

Of course, they knew in a general way why He had come into the world. He had called them one by one to be His followers. In their daily walk and talk with Jesus they learned to know that He had come to seek and to save those who were lost. From the words He spoke and the miracles He performed they learned that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Moreover, they heard Jesus make general references to His suffering and death. They had heard Him speak of Himself as the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep. He had told His enemies to destroy the temple of

His body and in three days He would raise it again. So in a measure they knew what Christ would do for them.

We also know in a measure what Christ has done for us. Like the Apostle Paul, I am determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, to center all my preaching and teaching in Jesus Christ and His work for our salvation. From our attendance at church services, our Bible reading, our attendance at Sunday school, our confirmation instruction, and other sources we have learned many things about Jesus and what He has done for us.

But we do not know so much that there is nothing else to learn. And how about the knowledge we have gained? Has it sunk deep into our hearts so that we appreciate the work of Christ as we should? Does our life show such appreciation? Is it not true that the mention of Christ and His work sometimes leaves us untouched and unmoved, cold and indifferent? So while we may know in a measure, we need to know more, and we need to appreciate it more.

A better understanding means deeper appreciation. The disciples of Jesus also needed to know more about Christ and His work. That is why Jesus for the first time in His ministry now told His disciples the details of His suffering, death, and resurrection. He began to tell them that He would go to Jerusalem, the heart and center of the Jewish nation and religious life.

There He would suffer many things at the hands of their religious leaders, the elders, chief priests, and scribes. These sufferings, in the form of betrayal, denial, physical abuse, mockery, scourging, and crucifixion, would lead to His death. He who was born without sin and whose whole life was free from sin would be put to death as though He was a violent criminal. He who is the eternal God, the Prince of Life, would be put to death by mortal man.

But death would not be the end for Him. On the third day He would be raised again. He would triumph over this last great enemy of man and would turn death into a blessing for all who would believe in Him. These and other details Jesus now began to reveal to them because they needed to know them. They needed to know these things for their own salvation and for sharing them with others.

If we are to appreciate more fully what Christ has done for us, we also must know more about His suffering, death, and resurrection. We need to know why

He went to Jerusalem and suffered there. Do you know all of these truths as you should? Do you know why an innocent person, like Jesus, should be so shamefully treated by sinful man? Do you know why God would permit His only Son to suffer such shame at the hands of those who themselves should be condemned? The more we know about the suffering and death of Christ and His resurrection, the more we shall appreciate what He has done for us.

It is also important that false notions must be removed. If we are to have a deeper appreciation of what Christ has done for us, we must also have some of our wrong notions about His Passion corrected. Peter didn't appreciate Christ's mention of His suffering at all, because he had a wrong notion about the work of Christ. He thought that Christ would set up an earthly kingdom and rule in earthly triumph and glory. And now Christ speaks of shame, suffering, and death? That will never do!

So he began to rebuke Christ, saying, ***“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”*** No doubt Peter said this in love. He certainly did not want one he loved so dearly to suffer so shamefully. But while Peter meant well, he was soundly rebuked by the Saviour, who said, ***“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”***

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus had been tempted by Satan to turn from the path of suffering. Then Jesus said, ***“Away with you, Satan!”***¹ Here again Satan was trying to turn Jesus from the path of suffering, but was using one of Jesus' disciples to tempt Him. Jesus recognised the voice of the Tempter and promptly resisted the temptation.

Peter no doubt felt that he was doing Jesus a favour. But actually he was putting a stumbling block in Christ's way. It was God's plan to save men by having His Son pay the price of their sins. Peter was judging according to human standards and thinking thoughts that would oppose the plans of God. For this reason he needed to be corrected. As long as he held such false ideas, he would never understand or appreciate the work of Jesus Christ for the children of men.

We must also have all false ideas removed from our minds concerning the suffering and death of our Redeemer if we want to properly appreciate what He has done for us. If we look upon Christ's suffering and death merely as a noble

martyrdom, or an inspiring example of dying for a cause in which one believes, we will misunderstand it completely.

If we review the details of the history of His Passion only to condemn the hateful voices that mocked Him and the wicked hands that drove the nails, we will not grasp the significance of His death. If we see the sins of the scribes, Pharisees, elders, Pontius Pilate, and others in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and fail to see that it was our sins that brought this woe on Him, we will fail to see the hand of God in the divine plan of redemption.

Whatever false notions we may have will be hanging like a fog over the light of the Cross. And when we cannot see the Cross clearly, we cannot appreciate its real meaning as we ought.

For that reason we set aside a certain season of the year in which we meditate especially upon the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we gather in church to review again the history of our Saviour's Passion, we shall go in spirit to Jerusalem.

As we read the Passion history, as we follow our Saviour in the Lenten sermons, as we become better acquainted with the facts or learn anew the things that time has erased from our minds, or as we get new insights into the plans and promises of God in leading His Son to the cross, we shall be led to a deeper appreciation of what Christ has done for us.

2. Behold, We Go Up To Jerusalem With Jesus! That We Might Be Encouraged To A More Faithful Following Of Him

And as we go in spirit to Jerusalem with our Saviour, we also learn to be more willing followers of Christ. That is the kind of followers He wants, willing followers. "*If anyone desires to come after Me*" means "If anyone is willing, let Him come after Me."

The Lord Jesus Christ forces no one into His service. He does not draft recruits. He wants volunteers. He wants willing hearts. But how will our stubborn, self-willed hearts be made willing? He does this by His Gospel of love. As we follow Him to Jerusalem and see His willingness to redeem us unworthy sinners, the icy coldness of our hearts is turned into a burning love, a holy zeal to follow Him.

By revealing to us His mercy and grace He challenges our love, draws us to Himself, and fills our hearts with eager willingness to walk in His ways and to glorify Him in word and deed. When we see Him giving Himself into death for us, we can no longer be satisfied with following afar off, like Peter, but are encouraged to a closer walking with Him and a more faithful following of Him

To follow Him therefore means that we must deny ourselves. ***“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself.*** To deny yourself does not mean, as some believe, to deprive yourself of certain foods on certain days, or to cut movie attendance to one movie a week, or to do without certain luxuries until Easter morning. The Saviour asks you to deny yourself.

When Peter denied Christ, he said ***“I do not know the Man!”***² When you deny yourself, you say, ***“I do not know this man, called myself. I know only that other Man, Jesus Christ. There was a time when I acknowledged only my own interests, my own self. I now renounce that. I now know Another, Jesus Christ. He comes first. His desires shall be my desires; His thoughts shall be my thoughts; His will shall be my will.”*** Self-denial means, then, a complete change of the fundamental principle of life. It means that Christ comes first. He must increase, and we must decrease.

Such self-denial is not easy, nor is the next requirement easy. ***“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross.”*** To take the cross of Christ on us is not as easy as wearing a cross on our coat lapel or on a necklace. To take the cross of Christ upon us means to bear whatever burden or endure whatever suffering is placed upon us because we are followers of Christ.

The burdens and sufferings which we bring on ourselves by our sins and follies, such as poverty which comes from foolish waste, ruined health which comes from drunkenness, disease resulting from a life of immorality, are the wages of sins. We must not call any of these things a cross which Christ has laid upon us.

Christ bore His cross, which led to His crucifixion, that He might do His Father’s will for our salvation. When we bear His cross, it means ***“crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts”*** that we might do His will. When Christ bore His cross, it meant shame, mockery, and ridicule. To be a faithful follower of

Christ and to take a firm stand with Him against the unbelief and sin of the world may make us the object of mockery and ridicule. For us to take up the cross of Christ means that we be faithful to Him, if need be even unto death, in the face of ridicule and persecution.

But while we are to take up His cross and follow Him, Jesus does not ask us to make crosses of our own. He does not ask us to impose upon ourselves some harsh, ingenious self-torture and then imagine that we are bearing the cross of Christ. He has His own workshop, in which He carefully fashions and fits the cross to each of us. We cannot take or choose. But this much we know, He will never make the cross too heavy, and He will always help.

We must lead an active Christian life. This is what *“and follow Me”* means. Certainly, denying yourself and taking up the cross is following Christ. But here Jesus adds the thought that we should keep on following Him. He adds the necessity of the positive, active Christian life, the purposeful imitation of Christ’s life of service.

The Christian life does not consist only in avoiding certain sins and meekly submitting to the reproach that unbelievers heap upon us. The life of Christ was an intensely active one. He came to serve. And if we are to follow Him, we must be active Christians. We must serve. How can we learn better such high and holy service of Christ than by going to Jerusalem to look at Him as He renders for us that great service for which He came into the world, the redemption of our souls?

What higher motive could inspire us than the love that moved Him to make the supreme sacrifice for our salvation? What nobler example for us to follow than the example of complete devotion to God and His will which He showed not only in His life but also in His willingness to die?

Jesus also gives us the reasons why we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Our text says, *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* Here Jesus uses the word “life” in a twofold sense and teaches the simple lesson that no man can serve two masters. The one meaning of life is this earthly, bodily life, which ends at the moment of death. The other is the true spiritual life, which does not end in death, but is in that moment perfected and translated into heaven.

He who wants to preserve this earthly life, with all its sinful lusts and pleasures, must neglect his spiritual life. No man can serve two masters. If he tries to save this earthly life, he may gain many things that this earthly life has to offer; but when death comes, these things will vanish like a vapour.

On the other hand the person whose faith is planted in the Redeemer is nurturing his spiritual life. He may lose some of the things of this world. He may have to give up some of its fleeting pleasures, its sugar-coated flattery, its sinful desires, which are sometimes so appealing. But that is only an apparent loss. In reality it is gain. He has found the true life, and that will remain. No man, nor Satan, nor even death itself, can take that from him. He has peace with God in this life, and when the moment of death comes he will enter eternal life. That is the promise given to all those who trust in the mercy of Christ.

To encourage us to a more faithful following of Him, Jesus also reminds us of the value of a human soul. ***“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** If a man could by some genius gain the whole world, with all its wealth, property, honour, power, and glory, would that save his soul? Or is there something that is more important than his soul? All of this world, with everything that it can offer, is not worth one human soul.

Scripture says in 1 Peter 1:18-19, ***“you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ.”*** Think of the value of your soul in the sight of God. Go to Jerusalem with Jesus, and you will see how highly He values your soul. He is suffering and dying that He might save us. Is He, then, expecting too much of us when He asks us to go with Him to Jerusalem, to meditate upon His suffering and death, that we might more faithfully follow Him?

Still another reason why we need to follow the Saviour more faithfully is that we might stand in the Judgment. Our text says, ***“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”*** ***“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”***³ This same Jesus who told His disciples how He would suffer and die told them that He would rise again; more than that, He would ascend to heaven to

sit on the right hand of God in glory. And in glory He will return to judge the world.

Then all people shall appear before Him, those who believe in Him as their Saviour and those who rejected Him. And then they will be judged. What will be the basis of this Judgment? Will they be asked what positions they had in this world? How much wealth they accumulated? How many friends they had? These things that concern people so much now, burst like a bubble in the hour of death. They have absolutely nothing to do with Judgment.

The question that will determine the verdict of each of us in Judgment will be *“What did you do with Jesus Christ?”* Those who rejected Him, either by opposing Him openly or simply by ignoring Him, will be rejected by Christ. But those who believed in Him and followed Him in this life will be welcomed by Jesus and will be taken into heaven’s glory.

Concerning the Judgement, we read in *Luther’s Small Catechism*, “The eternal destiny of each individual is determined the moment he dies, and the final judgment will not change that. On the last day after the resurrection of the body the sentence of life and death will be formally declared. Believing in Christ our Saviour, we need fear neither death nor judgment.”⁴

Let us, then, go up to Jerusalem with Jesus. As we see Him paying the price of our salvation with ready, willing love, our hearts will be warmed up to a more faithful following of Him. As we see Him deny Himself that He might do His Father’s will, we shall be encouraged to a more complete self-denial for Him.

As He bears the cross out to Calvary’s hill, yes, is crucified there without a word of complaint, we, too, shall be encouraged to bear our cross more willingly. And as He pours out His lifeblood to bring us back to God, the things that keep us away from God will seem less important, and we shall learn more and more how precious our soul is in His sight. The more we learn these lessons, the more faithfully we shall follow Him. Behold, let us go up to Jerusalem with Jesus! Amen.

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

¹ Matthew 4:10

² Matthew 26:74

³ 2 Corinthians 5:10

⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism* (Koehler) p 172