

If it was up to Peter, you would not have a Savior, nor would I. When Jesus tells His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer, and be killed, and on the third day be raised, Peter confronts Him to His face. He severely reprimands Jesus. *“This shall not ever happen to You!”*

What, is he insane? Has Peter never read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah where the prophet speaks plainly about how the Suffering Servant must die? Is he not familiar with Psalm 22 where David speaks of the Christ: *“All my bones are out of joint... they have pierced my hands and feet”*?

No, Peter knows these Scripture passages well. He also knows that Jesus is the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah writes. He just confessed that He is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God,”* of whom David speaks. So, if Peter is insane, he is insane with love for Jesus. A love, however, that is shaped not by God, but by the devil. Peter is going to protect Jesus from Himself. He assumes the role of Jesus’ advisor, His savior; of knowing, better than Jesus, what is best for Him. Yes truly, Peter is inserting himself in the place of God.

But God would never say such words to Jesus. His Father sent Him for the very purpose of suffering, and dying, and rising again. It is not God, therefore, who is speaking through Peter. It is the devil. The devil is using Peter’s love for Jesus to keep Him from the cross.

But Jesus will have none of it. *“Get behind Me, Satan!”* He says to Peter, *“You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

So, Peter does not get his way with Jesus. Do you know that he actually uses the word *mercy* in his rebuke? *“(God show) mercy to You, Lord!”* he says, *“this shall never happen to You!”* But if God shows mercy to Jesus, He will not show mercy to us. If Jesus does not go to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross, then you and I have no Savior, and we will have to bear the penalty of our own sin in hell forever.

That’s what Satan wants you know. He doesn’t want Jesus up on the cross. He wants you up there. Satan knows Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 quite well. And just like Peter, he knows that Jesus is the Christ. And if he can keep Him off the cross, he will bring everyone to hell with him.

But he can’t do it. Jesus must go to Jerusalem, and nothing can stop Him. Not the devil’s hatred. Not Peter’s love. Nothing. Jesus goes there. He suffers many things from the Sanhedrin – the elders, chief priests, and scribes. He dies on the cross. And on the third day He is raised from the dead. Satan has lost the battle with Jesus. But has he lost the battle with you and with me?

Here is what Jesus says to His disciples, including you and me. *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”* You cannot have Jesus’ cross. Only He could bear that cross. And because He did, everyone who follows Him is given their own cross to bear. Not a cross of punishment. Not the cross of God’s wrath. Not the cross of hell’s agony that Jesus was given. The cross of the Christian. The suffering that comes to every disciple just for following Jesus. And the devil, the same devil who wanted you up on Jesus’ cross, does not want you to bear your own cross.

Let's go ahead and admit it. It is painful suffering to deny ourselves. Our sinful flesh suffers when it cannot have what it wants. Satan does not want you to suffer in this way. He does not want you to bear that cross. He wants you, not to deny yourself, but to deny Jesus; to lead yourself through life rather than have Jesus leading you. And when the devil is able to succeed in this, he has won the battle. Not the battle with Jesus. The battle with you.

But Jesus is not finished with you. After dying on the cross and rising on the third day, He did not say: "I did My part. Now it's up to you, dear Christian, to do your part." No! If it was up to us, none of us would make it. We do not have what it takes to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus. We would all fail. Indeed, we fail every single day in this.

This is why Jesus says, "*If anyone would come after Me...*" Not "before Me." "*After Me.*" Jesus goes before you, not to show you how to do it, but as your Savior. He carried His cross and died on that cross so that you can deny yourself and follow Him. Because the only way you can take up your cross and follow Him is not because you are so strong and perfect, but because you are so weak and sinful. And being weak and sinful, as you carry your cross, you follow after Jesus whose cross speaks to you the word of forgiveness.

The power to deny yourself and follow Jesus is not in the command to just do it, but in His forgiveness for you for failing to do it.

Do you want to be a Christian? Do you want to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus? Then confess how you have failed in this and believe the word of forgiveness that God speaks to you in Christ Jesus.

Satan cannot, cannot win the battle with you, not when you run to your baptism daily where there is always, for you, the promise that your sins are forgiven. There in your baptism, in God's forgiveness for you, is the power to follow Jesus. There is where you deny yourself and accept the cross that God places upon you.

We need these crosses. We need the suffering that comes to us for following Jesus. Our crosses keep us humble and weak, and seeking always the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus.

The sufferings, the crosses that we all carry as Christians, we sometimes keep to ourselves. Others may not know how much we suffer for Christ's sake. But He knows. Jesus goes before you, not after you. Whatever you suffer is not strange and unknown to Him, therefore. He denied Himself for you. He carried His cross and died there for you. Will He not, therefore, help you carry yours? Amen.