



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

Goal

Jesus made an incredibly bold statement one day, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” In this series, we will rethink the purpose of the church so that we can better understand why it should be a priority in our lives.

At the beginning of each gathering take a few minutes to connect with one another and get updated on the week. Then the discussion questions will begin with a few reflection notes about the message and progress into a discussion of the biblical text. Finally, there is a concluding prayer, which can be read aloud in the group after having discussed prayer requests from those attending.

Introduction

03/26/2017

Suffering and sacrifice often seem contradictory when considered in light of the Christian claim that God is just and all-powerful. These two experiences turn some away from God while causing others to turn toward him. This week, John spoke on how the suffering of Jesus himself informs our understanding of the Christian movement.

Discussion Questions

1. What thoughts are still resonating with you from Sunday’s message?
2. What was most encouraging or challenging about this weekend’s message?
3. One of the texts John read was Matthew 16:13-20. In what ways did this text speak to you?
4. Continue reading through Matthew 16:21-28. How does Jesus follow Peter’s confession of faith and the promise to establish the Church? Why are these two things linked together?

Background to the Text

Immediately after the profession, most scholars mark a transition in 16:21 that initiates Jesus’ journey to the cross, which the disciples are not prepared to accept. In the coming sections, Jesus adjusts the disciples’ misunderstandings related particularly to their understanding of the term “Messiah” as a national leader and their expectation of having influence within Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus adjusts their expectation by teaching that the messiah must suffer for the sake of—for the benefit of, or on behalf of—the people.

The necessity of his suffering will begin to emerge more clearly in Matthew 20:28, where it is grounded in an obvious allusion to the prophetic model of God’s faithful servant who suffers for the sins of the people (Matthew 26:28) as seen in Psalm 22, Psalm 69, and most famously, Isaiah 52:13-53:12.



This has serious implications for his followers. He talks of a community that suffers in Matthew 10:38-39—take up your cross...he must deny himself. The goal is putting Jesus and God's kingdom first, considering the end goal and submitting oneself to his path.

The logic of self-denial depends wholly on the existence of life beyond the grave, which will make the joys and sorrows of this life pale into insignificance in comparison. The prediction of suffering and death is followed by a promise of resurrection to new life followed by Jesus' installment as ruler and judge. However, for the disciples, the message of suffering is so overwhelming that the latter promise is eclipsed by the former warning.

5. Matthew 16:23 gives a warning that connects "Satan" with the disciples' focus on "human things". What human things were the disciples focusing on? How does Jesus in the following verses challenge their perception?
6. The "human thoughts" of the disciples are often revealed by their reactions to what Jesus says and does. What elements of this message have been most challenging to accept? What do these reveal about our thoughts and hopes?
7. Jesus states that he *must* go to Jerusalem and undergo suffering. How does this statement hit you?
8. What is the promise and positive message of Jesus to those who suffer and lose their lives for, or on account of, Jesus?
9. Peter understood that Jesus' suffering and death was likely to have serious implications for those who are identified as his followers. What implications does this message and biblical text have for your life and pursuit of Jesus?

Prayer Requests

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.