

### **Romans 12:9-21**

- 9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.  
10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.  
11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.  
12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.  
13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.  
14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.  
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.  
16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.  
17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.  
18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.  
19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.  
20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."  
21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **Matthew 16:21-28**

- 21 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 the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.  
22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'  
23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'  
24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.  
25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.  
26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?  
27 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 they have done.  
28 'Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

### **Lose your life, save your life**

*Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28*

So you're a fisherman, in first century Galilee, living under Roman occupation, governed by Herod Antipas. Life is hard, there's a massive gap between rich and poor. You scratch a living catching and selling fish caught on the lake. All you know about God comes from what you hear at the synagogue and from the Hebrew scriptures, what we now know as the Old Testament. You know there's a prophesied Messiah who's expected one day to save Israel from many things, maybe even the occupying Romans. You've met this rabbi called Jesus who teaches and does amazing things and you just realised that he **is** this Messiah. That's where we've got to, and Jesus has acknowledged it, although he won't let you tell anyone yet, because the timing of all this is apparently crucial. The disciples were having trouble reconciling this because Jesus just didn't fit with what they'd been told. We have to try and see things from the point of view of a group of people who had no clue about what christianity would be; for them it was in the future. Although to us they were the first christians, they were just ordinary Jews trying to figure out what Jesus was on about. So Verse 21 is a shock to them Jesus *must* go to Jerusalem, he *must* suffer, he *must* die, he *must* rise again.

The Greek word means it was *necessary for him to die*.

Jesus was claiming to be the suffering servant prophesied in Isaiah 53. The Jews did not accept that it would be a suffering Messiah. But Jesus listened to the Father, so did Isaiah.

It's easy to be misled about what God is doing if you're not listening but just repeating what others say.

So Peter goes from one moment being convinced about Jesus being the Messiah and being acknowledged **by Jesus** as the future leader of the church, to being powerfully rebuked and called Satan **by Jesus**.

*Suffer and die? This shall never happen to you Lord!*

I think Peter's at once fearful of what's going to happen, and also trying to control things, because he's a bit pleased that he's going to be important for future plans. But Jesus disagrees: *Get behind me, Satan! You're a stumbling-block to me; you don't have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.*

This is a sly joke because Jesus named Simon *Petros/Peter*, the Greek for rock, the rock on which the church will be built.

But in common conversation a stumbling block meant a rock blocking someone's path. This is Jesus' point – selfish human concerns get in the way of God's work.

Then Jesus goes on to his familiar theme of how if we want to be fulfilled, we must be prepared to forgo what we want from life *26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?* Think about whether having everything we want improves us as people or whether there's still something missing.

I guarantee today's rich have that hole that needs to be filled. Power and influence will never ever fill it. I would class myself as rich. Now we do know I hope that we're saved by our faith and not by our deeds, but here you have a bit of reassurance from Jesus when he says: *....the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, [talking about his return] and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

So as I've said before if our hearts are right we will respond to God by using our gifts and abilities for Him, and there *will be* reward, but we will not know what that means during our lifetimes. So there is good news here, but I have to say that the main message is a very challenging one.

God's agenda for those of us who are seriously calling ourselves Christians is greater than we might think. We are the bearers of the good news. No one else is going to do it.

This was incredibly difficult for Peter and it's still difficult for us now to realise that if we really follow Jesus, we're swimming against the tide.

The world will oppose us. Look at the world now – by and large Christians are seen as irrelevant. The world always wants a Messiah like the Jews believed in, a crusading saviour. Even many Christians are misled, for instance in thinking Donald Trump to be the saviour of the American Dream, whatever that even is. This is the proof that the world, including too often the church, does not listen to the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus kept repeating this teaching that he had to suffer and die and rise again. The son of man came to die so that we could be free from sin. For us to be free it involved sacrifice. Jesus was God. God himself dying for each one of us. He died for each one of us. Our calling if we take him seriously is actually the same as his. To live lives of surrender to Him. At this point it was dawning on Peter that this is not a game. This is something we must all accept or reject. I think as Christians in the West we tend to live in a bit of a bubble because we're just ignored and not persecuted. So we don't have to make the life or death decision many *still* do have to make. But the truth remains – if we really follow Jesus we must be prepared to lose our lives for Him, to put *everything* else as secondary to Him. *If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.* This was Jesus being deliberately provocative. Hear me, He *didn't mean that* literally. But sometimes you need to drive a point home. Priorities. This passage from John's gospel chapter 6 is one I turn to sometimes to focus my mind on this. *[Jesus said to the disciples] there are some of you who do not believe.* For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe (and who would betray him). *65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."* **66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.** I ask myself the question, do I believe all this? Ask yourself.

Faith is still faith, whether it's weak or strong or somewhere in the middle. We may feel confused and wonder how this is relevant to us – well it's relevant because all that is asked is that we give in and confess that we believe. God does the rest, it's he who transforms our lives and gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, he who enables our belief to grow. That is the Good News. How do we respond? Firstly we just share our experience of Jesus with others. How might that look? Paul says this: *9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Amen