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Loaded Questions:
What Will You Give for Your Soul?
Matthew 16:21-28

Cedar Point Amusement Park in Ohio calls itself the "Roller Coaster Capitol of the World." The scariest of the bunch is the Top Thrill Dragster. How about we take a ride on it this morning? [video]

Peter must have felt like he was riding on an emotional version of Top Thrill Dragster! One moment he was high as a kite. The next moment, well let's just look. As we saw last week, one day Jesus led His disciples to an area called Caesarea Philippi, a beautiful and notorious place of idolatry. As they stood there watching these acts of pagan worship, Jesus asked His disciples the most important question of life: "Who do you say that I am?" Do you remember what happened next? (16:16-20)

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it!

It was Peter's finest moment, standing there as Jesus bragged on him. Remember that roller coaster? He's on the top of the world now. But he is about to come crashing back down.

[Read Matthew 16:21-26]

This is a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Until now, He has been teaching the disciples through parables. Now, He gets very explicit about the nature of His mission. He has not come just to teach or heal or cast out evil spirits or even to raise people from the dead... all of which we have seen. Those acts of power helped Peter and the boys recognize who Jesus really was: the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of the Living God. So Peter got that much right.

But Jesus didn't come primarily to teach or heal or exorcise or resuscitate. He came to rescue. His primary mission was about to be fulfilled in this final week of His life... the week that we commemorate starting today on Palm Sunday. The mission of Jesus called for Him to be betrayed, arrested, abused and killed so He

could then be raised back to life again. Jesus came—on purpose—to offer His life as a sacrifice.

But wait a second! This made no sense! Jesus was the Messiah, right. We just figured that out, right? Isn't the Messiah supposed to conquer the enemies of God's people? Free them from Roman oppression? Set up His Kingdom on this earth? How can he do that if He is dead? And that Church He just spoke about—the Church that would storm the Gates of Hell—how exactly was He going to establish a movement like that if He were dead?

No, no, no... this makes no sense. And so Peter, now that he is the Chief Apostle—now that he has a new name and new authority—Peter decides he had better set poor Jesus straight. Listen to this! He “took him aside...” “Come here, Jesus. We need to have a little chat. And it would be best if we did it in private; I don't want to embarrass you in front of the rest of the guys...” Can you imagine it? Peter “took Jesus aside.”

But that's not the half of it! “...he took him aside and began to rebuke him!” “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus... what are you thinking? You are talking crazy talk! Listen, we are just catching our stride! The people love you. Everyone is talking about you, and now you've got me to help get everything organized. But this dying talk has got to stop! You're not going to die! You are the Messiah! You are the King! Kings don't die! They triumph!”

It is breathtakingly audacious. And Peter, who was sitting on top of the world, is about to take a nosedive. “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’” Wow! Only verses ago Jesus gave Simon a new name. Peter. Now Jesus gives Peter another new name: Satan! Only a few verses ago, Jesus praised Peter because God had revealed spiritual truth to him. Now Jesus rebukes Peter because he is listening to Satan's lies. Only a few verses ago, Simon had become a Rock for Jesus. Now that “Rock” has become what? A “tripping stone.” You are walking along just fine and suddenly, you stub your toe on and you fall on your face.

Can you say roller coaster? One moment, Peter is the blessed-by-God rock upon which Jesus will build His Church. The next moment he is the deceived-by-Satan tripping stone who is obstructing Jesus from fulfilling His mission. What happened? How did Peter fall from such heights so quickly? What was the lie that the adversary planted in his mouth? This: “You don't need to die, Jesus! You can accomplish your work in some other way! You can set up your kingdom like other kings do—with power and coercion. This idea of suffering and dying... it is embarrassing. God would never allow such a thing to happen to His Son.”

Ah, but God sent His son precisely to allow such a thing. The betrayal, arrest, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus were God's plan all along... from the beginning. God didn't look down and say, “Oops! My boy got Himself into a peck of trouble this time. What am I going to do to get Him out of this one?” No, this

was God's plan. The suffering and death of Jesus had been the plan since eternity. The Jewish leaders should have known it, too. Their greatest prophet predicted it. Listen to this messianic prophecy from Isaiah 53 written hundreds of years earlier and you tell me if the sacrificial death of Jesus caught God by surprise?

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all..."

It was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer.

Crucifixion wasn't an interruption on the way to Jesus' destiny. Crucifixion was Jesus' destiny. Of course Satan didn't want Him to go to the cross. It would spell his doom and that of all who followed him. And for a moment, Satan persuaded Peter to be his front man; to use his relationship with Jesus to divert Him from the very mission for which He had come to earth in the first place.

"Get behind me, Satan!" It was shocked silence. Everyone was uncomfortable; Peter was humiliated. And then... then we hear the gentleness of Christ as He redeems Peter again—along with the rest of his disciples. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

Then Jesus drives home the point with this loaded question: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" If ever there was a rhetorical question that expects no answer, it is this one. Because the answer is obvious! If you spend your whole life accumulating all that matters most to you—wealth, prestige, glory, relationships, reputation, if you spend your whole life focusing only on this life and in the end, lose the only eternal thing you possess—your soul, what gain is that? All that you worked so hard for—struggled, strained, suffered to acquire... if the price you pay for your stockpile of earthly trinkets is your soul—how insane would that be? "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The year was 1000 AD, 186 years after the death of Emperor Charlemagne—one of the greatest medieval kings and conquerors—Emperor Otto decided to celebrate the new millennium by opening Charlemagne's tomb and taking a peek inside. (I know... how weird is that?) So they popped off the door and found an extraordinary site. The tomb was packed with incredible riches: gold, jewels, pearls... an absolute fortune. And there, seated in the midst of that finery, was the skeleton of Charlemagne himself, still perched on his throne, still wearing his crown. In his lap, there lay an open Bible, and the bony finger of one of the

greatest conquering kings rested on Mark chapter 8 verse 36: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

I have had deathbed conversations with people full of regrets, because all to which they had devoted their life they were about to lose. Queen Elizabeth's very last words were, "All my possessions for one more moment of time."

So, then... if you don't want to forfeit your eternal soul in exchange for the trinkets of this world, what's the answer? Here's Jesus answer: "Get behind in life." Not exactly the advice you'd give your college kid as she is striking out on her own, is it? "Honey, in order for you to be happy, there's one thing I want you to do. Get behind in life!" What? No, we're supposed to get ahead in life! Make the most of life... climb the ladder, set our goals, reach for the stars, never be satisfied. That's Tiger Woods' secret according to a new book about him. He is never satisfied with success. (No kidding.)

But that is not Jesus' way. He says, "If you want to make the most of life, you must get behind in life. You must get behind me." Three times He says this; first, harshly to Peter, when Peter presumes to get in front of Jesus and tell Him what to do. "Get behind me, Satan." Doesn't that seem like an odd rebuke from Jesus? When we get mad at our kids we might say, "Get back to your room" but we never say, "Get behind me." But do you remember the very first words Jesus spoke to Peter? He saw him on the shore of Galilee, fishing, and said "Follow me and I will teach you how to fish for human beings." If you are going to follow, where must you be? Behind! You cannot follow from the front.

For one silly moment, Peter let his head swell. He took Jesus aside. He rebuked Him. He was going to lead Jesus. And what did Jesus say? "Get behind me where you belong! It is Satan who is trying to make you the boss of me. I'm the boss and you are the disciple, and the only place for a disciple is behind... following."

Just to make His point, Jesus restates it two more times. "If anyone would come after me (that's behind, right?), he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me!" Get behind me... come after me... follow me. Get the point?

Wherever Jesus goes, you go. Whatever Jesus says, you do. Whenever the two of you are in conflict, you lose; He wins. It means learning to say no to yourself and yes to Jesus... denying yourself. When was the last time you said no to yourself for Jesus' sake? "No, I won't eat that; no, I won't drink that; no, I won't buy that. No, I won't hoard that; no, I won't schedule that; no, I won't look at that." When was the last time that you told yourself, "No, Mark, no!" so you could say yes to Jesus? Really, when was the last time?

Our culture screams, "Say yes to yourself; you deserve it!" Jesus says, "Say no to yourself and follow me; put to death the lordship of your own life and get behind

me where you belong. Walk behind me, listen to me, learn from me, obey me, suffer with me, die with me—and when you do, then I will show you real life.”

“Well, what does that mean for me? Exactly? If I’m going to follow Jesus, what exactly do I have to do?” I don’t know. You aren’t following me. You are following Jesus, which means, you have to spend time with Him, listen to Him, study His word, be with His people. No one can follow for you. No one can be a disciple for you. You must follow Him. That’s part of spiritual maturity... choosing to say, “I will follow Jesus. I will get out of His way, get behind Him and stay close to Him. I will read His Word daily to hear Him speak to me. How many have been reading the Bible regularly since we challenged ourselves two weeks ago? If Jesus says, “No,” I will say, “No!” If Jesus says, “Yes,” I will say, “Yes.” If he says, “Put that habit to death,” I will slay it without mercy or hesitation. And if he bid me, “Die”... I will pick up my own cross and follow Him there.

It would be an odd bumper sticker, wouldn’t it? “Get behind in life.” But it is the one that most American Christians ought to stick on their bumper... if not on their forehead. It is the motto that most of us in this room need to adopt. Most of us who consider ourselves “saved” still prefer to join Peter out in front of Jesus. Telling Him what to do; rebuking Him when His plans are embarrassing; arguing with Him when He asks us to do something sacrificial or uncomfortable. Guess what Jesus is saying to every one of us this morning? “Get behind me....”

So, our new motto as a church: “Get behind in life.” I will make it my purpose to get behind in life. To get behind Jesus and follow Him wherever He leads.

Do you see these roses? Do you know what they represent? Every one of these blooms represents a person who got behind Jesus within the last week. 16 of our number confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior over the past few days... during worship last Sunday, during our Christianity Explored class and in our Welcome to the Family class. I am not aware of any other week in the history of our church where God has brought more people to salvation than in this last week.

Hallelujah! Now, let’s pray for them—and for every one of us—that we will have the courage to get behind in life. To deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus, wherever He may lead.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Compare Peter's two confessions. What happened between the first and the second?
2. What was Jesus' loaded question? Is it relevant for our time? Why ?
3. There are three parts to Jesus' call to His disciples. What are they? What do these mean? Which is hardest for you and why?