

# Jesus Predicts His Death

**Matthew 16:21-26; Mark 8:31-37; Luke 9:22-25**

**DIG:** According to Jesus, what is the cost of true discipleship? How do some people react when they learn that being a true follower of Yeshua is costly? What is your reaction to the cost? What does it mean to **lose your life** for Messiah's sake? What does it mean to **gain the whole world**?

**REFLECT:** In what ways are you trying to **deny** yourself and **take up** your **cross**? Think of a time when you wanted to hide the fact that you are a believer. What made you want to keep quiet? How should a believer's life be different from a non-believer's life? What do you need to change to be a true disciple? What is the reward for the person who follows the commands given by the Lord? What is the difference between denying yourself and self-denial?

**As Peter's confession illustrated the issue of partial sight on the part of Isra'el (see Fx - On This Rock I Will Build My Church), this section, while still at Caesarea Philippi, will illustrate the issue of the partial blindness.**

Although the messianic revelation was to be kept private for the moment, Yeshua took that opportunity to remind His talmidim of events that awaited Him. For the first time, Jesus predicted His passion, or His death. Only after Peter's confession does Yeshua begin to explain His program of death and resurrection. Consequently, He begins to deal with this aspect of His mission. As the time of His death draws near the Lord will explain this in more detail. By this time Christ was already in the last year of His life on earth.

But no matter how often He tells them, or what He tells them, they never fully understand. This is the issue of partial blindness. So when Jesus died, they were caught off guard. At this point Messiah kept it simple, mentioning four steps: (1) He must go to Jerusalem, (2) There He must suffer, being rejected by the Jewish leadership, (3) He will be killed, and (4) He will rise again on the third day.

From that time on, Yeshua began to teach His apostles what was going to happen to Him. The arrival of the Meshiach will not be as commonly expected. It will not be with great fanfare and celebration at His first arrival but with solemnity. He said: **The Son of Man must (dia) go to Jerusalem and suffer many things** (see my commentary on Isaiah Jd - Yet It Pleas'd the Lord to Crush Him, and Cause Him to Suffer). **There He will be**

**rejected by the** Great Sanhedrin, or **the elders, the Sadducees and the Torah-teachers** (Matthew 16:21a; Mark 8:31a; Luke 9:22a). The definite article appears before each group, showing equal guilt. This should not have been so surprising in that **Jesus** had already experienced significant public rejection from many of those same rabbinic leaders. But the intensity of the **Jerusalem** confrontation would be far greater than anything they had previously experienced.

**This is the first of three times that Jesus predicts His death** (for the second time see **Ge - Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time**, and for the third time see **Im - The Son of Man Came to Serve and to Give His Life as a Ransom for Many**). Christ elaborated that **He must (dia) be killed** by a hostile mob. The word **must**, or the Greek word *dia*, means *it was necessary*. The word points to the inevitableness of the Cross. This would be tragic indeed if this was the end of the story, but **Jesus** reveals more essential information. He assured His talmidim that **on the third day be raised to life** (Mattityahu 16:21b; Mark 8:31b; Luke 9:22b). Although a time of struggle and rejection was coming, it would all be a part of the LORD's prophetic plan for the **Meshiach's** First Coming as the **suffering Servant** (Isaiah 53).

*It's easy to set lofty goals that are often forgotten in the heart and drudgery of preparation. Many people are champions in their minds. But far fewer pay the debt of grueling training and loneliness that precede glory. Think of a time when your involvement in an activity required significant discipline or sacrifice. What aspects of your life did this affect? What did you learn about yourself in the process?*<sup>860</sup>

It is important to know that the rabbis also saw strong evidence of the two missions of the coming Messiah. Understandably, many focused on the Meshiach ben David would overthrow all the enemies of Isra'el and establish the kingdom of God on Earth (Isaiah Chapters 9 and 11). But the rabbis also admitted that there were many descriptions of the Messiah ben Joseph would somehow suffer at the hands of the world.

Since this picture of a suffering Messiah was so different from the promises of the coming King, some of the Talmudic rabbis came up with the view that perhaps there would be two distinct messiahs. How this could happen was debated, but one view was that the Son of Joseph would come and be rejected by the world (like Joseph of Genesis), perhaps even killed in a battle (Tractate Sukkah 52a, which quotes Zechariah 12:10 as the death of Meshiach ben Joseph)! Only then would the Son of David come to rescue the first Messiah and all of Isra'el.

It should be pointed out that the Bible never speaks of two **Messiahs**. How could one person fulfill both of these contrasting pictures of **the Meshiach**? **Jesus** gives the perfect answer that He, as **God's** only true **Messiah**, will fulfill both missions of ben Joseph (by suffering) and ben David (by resurrection). It is a most perfect way to fulfill both missions in one person (see **Mv - The Jewish Concept of Two Messiah's**)!<sup>861</sup>

**He spoke plainly about this (Mark 8:32a)**. The verb is imperfect, showing continuous action. Our **Lord** repeatedly and in great detail gave them what **He** had to tell them. It was not a quick, short statement. The word **plainly** is the Greek word *parresia*. In other words, **He spoke openly, unmistakably**. This is the ordinary Greek word that means *frank, unreserved speech*, as opposed to partial or total silence. Here, as in **Yochanan 11:14, 16:25, 29**, it means **plain speech** as opposed to hints or veiled allusions, such as **Jesus** had previously given: **But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast (Mark 2:20)**.

**But each time Yeshua predicted His death, one or more talmidin responded with pride or misunderstanding**. Here, **Peter**, who passed the test so magnificently at **Caesarea Philippi**, failed miserably here. **Peter took Him aside** (but evidently not far enough) **and began to rebuke Him (Mark 8:32b)**. **Rebuke** is a very strong word. It means *to criticize, to reprimand, to prevent an action from happening even by using physical force*. It was quite a paradox for **Peter**. At **Caesarea Philippi** he identified **Jesus** as **the Messiah**, here he rebukes **Christ**, thus showing his incomplete understanding of the destiny of the Savior. **Never, Lord!** he said. **This shall never happen to you (Mattityahu 16:22)!**

**But when Jesus quickly turned around and looked at His apostles**. Our **Lord** must have been conscious of the fact that the other **talmidim** had heard what **Peter** had said, for had **they** not, there would have been no need to subject **Kefa** to the lesson he received in front of **them** all. Then **He rebuked Peter**. **Mark** uses the same word (Greek: *epitimaō*) that he used of **Peter** rebuking **Yeshua**. He said: **Get behind Me, Satan!** **Messiah** recognized a repetition of the temptation of **Satan** in the wilderness. There, after showing **Him all the kingdoms of the world**, he said to **Jesus**: **All this I will give You if you bow down and worship me (Matthew 4:8-9)**. It was a temptation to go around the Cross and rule the world from the hands of **Satan**, the god of this age (**Second Corinthians 4:4**). And he was using the foremost of **the apostles** do tempt the **Lord**. The point is **Kefa** wanted what **Satan** wants. Because **Simon Peter** didn't want **Jesus** to go to the cross, so **Peter** was doing **the Adversary's** work for **him**. **Jesus** didn't call **Peter**, **Satan**, but that, recognizing the source **He** spoke directly to **the Tempter**, including **Kefa** in the rebuke.

**You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33).** Perhaps Yeshua was alluding to Peter's rejection that **He must be killed** as coming directly from **Satan himself**. Since the Hebrew word for "satan" means *opposition*, another option is that Peter was becoming an *obstacle* in the path of the cross. Either way, Kefa is rebuked by his Rabbi for thinking *from a human perspective, not from God's perspective*. Too often today, people still tell God how He should be accomplishing His plans instead of humbly listening to Him! How many even reject Yeshua today as **the Messiah** because He does not fit their idea of what Christ should do? We would be wise to listen more to God and His Word than to our own ideas.<sup>862</sup>

*Can Satan influence believers? Yes. Can he indwell believers? No. Does he overhear our silent prayers in the prayer garden of our minds? No. There is only room for one on the throne of our hearts, and Jesus Christ is on that throne.*

**Each time the apostles respond with pride or misunderstanding, Jesus followed with teaching about servanthood or cross-bearing discipleship.** A suffering Messiah had important implications for those who would follow Him. Then Jesus called the crowd of disciples to Him along with His apostles and taught them **three things**.

**First, if you want to follow Christ, you must say "No" to yourself.** He said: **Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).** This clearly illustrates that Messiah's Kingdom is exactly the opposite of most of our natural inclinations. In addition, to **take up their cross** means to identify with Christ's rejection. If you want to follow Christ, you must identify with His rejection. A true **disciple** is one who will follow the suffering role of **the Messiah**. Self-sacrifice is the hallmark of **the Messiah** and His followers. By submitting to Jesus, we are in reality merely giving back to Him what is rightfully His to begin with!

*The challenges that Christ presented still interrupt our lives. Denying, losing, dying - these are not the standards the world around us uses for successful living. We're trained to avoid such sacrifices, to look out for ourselves. But Yeshua stands before us without apology and asks, "Is there anything you value more highly than Me?" We may have a difficult time answering that question, but only an honest answer will do.<sup>863</sup>*

**Follow Me:** the word **follow** is the Greek word *akoloutheo*, it means *to take the same road as another does*. It is used with the associative instrumental case. It is as if Jesus is saying: **Follow with Me**. The idea is not that of following behind another, but that of

accompanying the other person, *taking the same road* that **He** takes, and fellowshiping with **Him** along the Way (Acts 9:2 and 24:14).<sup>864</sup>

**Second, although the price of discipleship is costly, it is even more costly for those who ignore their Creator.** In one of the great ironies of the spiritual world, **Yeshua** states: **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.** Everyone wants a happy and full life. But those who focus exclusively on that goal are actually in danger of missing the mark. Too many today are actually destroying the real purpose of their lives as they attempt to find life!

Yet the irony applies to the opposite side of the equation as well: **But whoever loses their life for Me and for the Gospel will save it** (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24). When you're full of yourself, **God** can't fill you. But when you empty yourself, **God** has a useful vessel. The Scriptures are full of examples of those who did just that. In his gospel, **Matthew** mentions his own name only twice. Both times **he** calls himself a **tax collector**. In his list of **apostles**, **he** assigns himself the eighth spot. **John** doesn't even mention his name in his gospel. The twenty appearances of "John" all refer to the Baptizer. **John** the apostle simply calls himself **the other talmid** (John 13:23 CJB) or **one of His talmidim, the one Yeshua particularly loved** (John 20:3 CJB). **Luke** wrote the gospel of **Luke** and the book of **Acts**, two of the most important books in the Bible, but never once penned his own name!<sup>865</sup>

It is important to understand the difference between joy in **the Lord** and happiness in the world. All of **the apostles** were martyred, with the exceptions of **John** and Judas Iscariot (see **Cy - These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**). Believers should have a joy in **Messiah** despite their circumstances in the world. **Peter** was crucified with his body turned upside down; **Andrew** was also crucified; **James** was beheaded; **Philip** was hung upside down with iron hooks through his ankles until he died, **Nathaniel** was flayed alive; **Thomas** was run through with a lance; **Matthew** was slain with the sword; **James** was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the Temple and then beaten to death; **Thaddaeus** died after being shot with arrows; and **Simon the Zealot** died by being sawn in half. None of them were happy about it. But they all had the joy of **the Lord** because they knew that by losing their lives, they were secure in **Christ** (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). It's not that those who follow **Him** have to be martyrs, but that they are willing to be martyrs if faithfulness to **the Messiah** demands it.

**Third, discipleship is something that every believer attains to for true spiritual safety and true riches.** There is nothing in this world that people can exchange for their life. Even the most "successful" person in this present age will eternally regret neglecting their soul. The eternal Kingdom is worth much more than any temporal accolades or

possessions. Actually, words cannot even explain the enormity of the difference. **What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?** Here is the ultimate hyperbole. "Imagine, if you can," **Yeshua** was saying, "what it would be like to somehow possess **the whole world**. Of what lasting benefit would that be, if in gaining it you forfeited your soul, your eternal life?" Such a person would be a walking spiritual zombie who temporarily owned everything but who faced an eternity in hell rather than in heaven. **Or, Jesus** continued, **what** could possibly be worth having during this lifetime, if to gain it you would have to **exchange** your **soul** (**Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36-37; Luke 9:25**)?

To gain every possession possible in this world and yet be without **Christ** is to be bankrupt forever. But to abandon everything in this world for the sake of **Messiah** is to be rich for eternity.<sup>866</sup> In 1956 the Quechua Indians of Ecuador murdered Jim Elliott with several other missionaries. This 29-year-old Christian martyr, husband, and father of a one-year-old baby girl, had written in his journal, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what which he cannot lose."

Can you imagine what it was like for the church at Smyrna (see my commentary on **Revelation - Ba - The Church at Smyrna**) as they watched their beloved and aged pastor burn at the stake? Polycarp was his name. He was a disciple of **Jesus' talmid, the apostle John**. One could tell it immediately because he possessed the same tenderness and compassion as his mentor. Polycarp was Bishop of the church at Smyrna (present day Turkey). Persecution broke out in Smyrna and many Christians were fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The godless and bloodthirsty crowd called for the carcass of the leader - Polycarp. The authorities sent a search party to find him. He had been taken into hiding for some Christians but the Romans tortured two young believers until they finally disclosed his location. When the authorities arrival was announced there was still time to whisk Polycarp away but he refused to go saying, "**God's** will be done."

In one of the most touching instances of Christian grace imaginable Polycarp welcome his captors as if they were friends. He talked with them and insisted they eat a meal. He made only one request before being taken away - he asked for one hour to pray. The Roman soldiers listened to his prayer. Their hearts melted and they gave him two hours to pray. They had second thoughts as well and were overheard asking each other why they were sent to arrest him? Other authorities also sympathetic when Polycarp arrived. The Proconsul tried to find a way to release him too. "Curse **God** and I will let you go!" he pleaded. Polycarp's reply was: "For eighty-six years I have served him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" The Proconsul again looked for a way out. "Then do this old man, just swear by the spirit of the emperor and that will be

sufficient." Polycarp's reply was: "If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don't know who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian." More entreaties by the Proconsul, Polycarp stood firm. The proconsul threatened with the wild beasts. Polycarp's reply was: "Bring them forth. I would change my mind if it meant going from worst to best, but not to change from right to wrong."

The Proconsul threatened, "I will burn you alive!" Polycarp's reply was: "You threaten with fire that burns for an hour and is over but the judgment on the ungodly is forever." The fires engulfed him, but his blood extinguished the flames and was therefore finished off with a dagger. He was buried for the cause of **Christ** on February 22, 155 A.D. It was as much a day of victory as it was a day of tragedy. Polycarp illustrated the power of knowing **Jesus** intimately - intimately enough to follow **Him** into the flames. As **the Lord** said: **What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?**