

OpenTheo

Caesarea Philippi (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the meaning of Jesus' statement about binding and loosing in Caesarea Philippi. Gregg explains that Jesus was giving his apostles authority to initiate actions on earth that would be reflected in heaven. He suggests that this may also apply to the binding and loosing of demons. Gregg emphasizes the importance of not compromising one's convictions, even if it means sacrificing one's life, as one's soul is more valuable. The talk concludes with a discussion of the apostles' self-denial and the relevance of this concept for modern-day believers.

Transcript

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Then he talks about the authority that exists whenever two or more agree about anything, although the anything doesn't necessarily focus on the issue of spiritual warfare, but actually focuses on church discipline, inclusion or exclusion of persons from the church. Now, perhaps instead of raising all the questions, having brought up the data, I should give you some kind of a tentative answer to what I think the meaning probably is.

It should first be pointed out, I think, that binding and loosing was actually a very common expression used by the rabbis. It's most likely that Jesus' disciples would have understood it in its common sense as popularized by the rabbis with whom they were very familiar. The rabbis taught in the synagogues every Sabbath, and no doubt the language of the rabbis was familiar to all Jews.

And the rabbis spoke quite often about binding and loosing, and it was a figure of speech that meant to allow or to disallow some particular behavior. To allow or to disallow some particular behavior. For example, where one rabbi was lenient, it might be said that he loosed a certain behavior, that is, he allowed it.

But a rabbi who was strict would be said to bind a certain action by disallowing it. It meant if he bound it, he didn't allow it. If he loosed it, he did allow it.

And this was, of course, usually relating to ethical or religious practices. Now, there's a

good chance that Jesus' disciples would have understood his comments in that typical rabbinic way of expressing things. And if he did, then it would suggest that the binding and loosing that the apostles were engaged in had to do with allowing or disallowing what would become normative Christian practice.

This doesn't mean he was giving the apostles the authority the rabbis had, because Jesus didn't think the rabbis had any authority. But it would mean that he was giving the actual authority to the apostles that the rabbis pretended to have. Rabbis never spoke with authority like Christ did.

That's what the great difference between Jesus' teaching was from that of the rabbis, as noted by everyone who heard him. But the rabbis did profess to have some kind of right to be heard. And if Rabbi so-and-so had a high reputation and he bound certain behavior, then there'd be certain people who would be in their conscience restricted by that declaration.

But that rabbi didn't have any actual authority from God, but the apostles actually did. They could determine what would and what would not be acceptable practice in the church. Now, that would fit the latter case, especially in chapter 18, where it says you kick a person out of the church if his behavior doesn't work out.

It would be perfectly natural for him to say to the apostles, you guys are the ones who have the rights to determine what's going to be acceptable and what's not going to be acceptable. And what behavior will be tolerated as normative in the church and what behavior will not be tolerated as normative in the church. It would not be the same thing as saying you get to decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

It would just be saying you get to decide what the church is going to stand for. What doctrines, what practices, what policies are going to be Christian, are going to have the name Christian. In other words, he's conferring on them the authority to make the declarations and to stand unchallenged by the rank and file of their subordinates in the church.

It would not be necessary to take a vote. As long as the apostles had made a decree, the church would say, okay, Jesus gave them the authority to bind. That is to restrict a certain behavior or to loose it.

That is to allow it, to determine what's normative for Christians. Now, that makes perfectly good sense to me. I don't know if it does to others.

But it would seem to be saying that Peter and the other apostles particularly had this authority. Now, there's something else to observe here that is commonly overlooked. And that is that the translation of Matthew 16, 19 and the like translation of the identical statement in Matthew 18, 18, the two places that talk about binding and loosing, the

translation that we're looking at right now is not quite perfectly accurate.

Actually, most translations that I've seen are not quite perfectly accurate. And I don't say that based on putting myself above the translators, but based on putting some scholars against other scholars. Basically, one can affirm what I'm about to say simply by looking up in a Greek-English interlinear New Testament.

Or by a great number of commentaries that bring this out. Or in some cases, I think the New American Standard Version renders this somewhat correctly, if I'm not mistaken. And I think the NIV doesn't, but I think the NIV puts it in a footnote, renders it correctly in a footnote, if I'm not mistaken.

In fact, I'm not even sure. Let me take a look here. It's possible that the New King James doesn't do anything in the margin with this.

But basically, it should read like this. From the Greek, it reads like this. And whatsoever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven.

And whatsoever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. Anyone have the New American Standard here? I thought someone did. Who does? Tim? Does it read something like that there? Read it out loud to me, if you would.

Okay, that's not as clear as I thought. I thought it was a little clearer than that in the NASB. What about NIV? Someone's got the NIV? She's still willing to admit it after all these months.

Go ahead. Go ahead and read it. And there's a marginal note, isn't there, a footnote? Will have been bound in heaven, will have been loosed in heaven.

That's what I was saying. That's what it is in the Greek. For some reason, translators have missed it fairly consistently in most of the translations.

But consulting the Greek, do you have a better translation there? Oh, it's in the margin. What is your version? New King James? Okay, for some reason, my edition doesn't have that there, but that's what it should say. Now, that being the case, I mean, this is no trifle.

This is no minor difference. In fact, it changes the entire sense of the statement. If Jesus said, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven, it would be as if Jesus was saying, you guys initiate, and heaven will follow whatever you say.

Isn't that what it would mean? You guys decide what you want, you approve it, and heaven will endorse it. You say it's okay, then God will say it's okay because you said so. But you see, the way it should read is that heaven, that is the authority of God, has

already decreed certain things to be true, and the apostles will simply be the ones binding and loosing on earth the things that have already been bound and loosed by God.

In other words, the role of the apostles will not be to initiate new ideas and conventions, but that they are authorized to enforce those things that God has himself determined. They will, because they've been taught under Christ, because they'll have special revelation from the Spirit and so forth, they will be in the position to declare to the church what things God has approved and what things God has not approved. Whatever God has already bound or loosed in heaven, they will bind and loosed on earth.

That is, they will act on the earthly level as the enforcers of what God has already enacted in heaven. So essentially, when the apostles would say, I decree that so and so should be done, the idea is that they do so because they're in touch with God, and they know what God has decreed, so they're the official spokespersons about such things. Having the keys to the kingdom would simply mean they've been given the authority to bind and loose or to allow and disallow certain behaviors and doctrines in the church, but they would not be able to innovate their own ideas about such things.

They were to simply enforce what God had already established or decreed on the subjects on which they spoke. Now, does this apply at all to the area of binding and loosing demons? Well, I don't know anyone who's ever wanted to loose any demons, but as far as binding goes, I would say it may have some relevance by way of extrapolation. In other words, it is not the case that in these passages, Jesus is thinking about our dealing with demons as a principal focus of these passages.

He'd be saying that the church, or the apostles at least, and possibly the church as a whole, would be in the position to enforce on earth whatever things God has already established as the case in heaven. Now, we know from what the scripture says in a number of places that Satan has been bound as far as heaven is concerned. Satan has been stripped of his authority as far as heaven is concerned.

It would be then for the church to enforce on earth this reality by going about and taking from Satan his realm, basically. Going and taking those people who are subject to him and bringing them instead under subjection to Christ. Which is no doubt what Paul had in mind when he said, The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Our weapons are there to bring everybody's thoughts into obedience to their Lord, not into the obedience of Satan, whom unbelievers currently follow. Now, that would simply be an extension of the principle. It would be a far cry from accuracy to say that Jesus is here intending to speak on the subject of spiritual warfare.

But what he says, he says by way of axiom. It's sort of like a truism. Whatever God has ordained in heaven, you guys do it on earth.

And since we know from other passages that one of the things that has gone on in heaven is the stripping of Satan's authority. And the binding, as it were, of Satan. This is a figure of speech.

But that what our activities on earth basically function to establish on earth the reality that's already in heaven. Satan is stripped of authority on heaven. We take from him his realm and his authority on earth.

And that could be called binding him, I suppose. But not in the sense that we often think of that in charismatic sermons on the subject. I would say in regard to this, before I go further, maybe, Jaylene, you can... Well, is this authority for every Christian? This is a very difficult question to answer.

And I don't want to say no. But I would say that it's hard to establish whether he would apply to all Christians or not. Because he made the statements in private conference with his disciples.

In one case at Caesarea Philippi where no one was with him except the apostles. And the other case was when he and the apostles were in a house together. Although we don't know exactly how private it was, there's no evidence that there was a crowd.

So it's hard to say. What I would say, however, is this. That the apostles were distinct in terms of their authority over the church.

But they were not distinct in terms of their general mission. The general mission of the church is that which the apostles were on the vanguard and the leadership of. As a part of the church, I think it can be said that the church, under the apostles' authority, was in the business of binding on earth what was bound in heaven.

And loosing on earth what loosed in heaven. It certainly, at least it would go along well with my own perception of what it means for Satan to be bound. I believe it is the case that when Christians go forward on missions, and in intercessory prayer, and evangelize, and bring people to Christ, and tear down the strongholds of the enemy, that they are enforcing on earth a reality that is true in heaven.

In a sense, they're binding on earth what's bound in heaven. But since the apostles are long dead, and yet the church is still involved in the same mission, I would have to say that the authority must rest in the church corporately, or it would seem to. Though it may not rest in the same measure in every individual.

There was a time when I thought that everything in the Bible that Jesus said to the apostles was for every Christian. I've mentioned this to you before. I no longer think that

that is true.

I don't think that's a responsible way to understand some of the things that Jesus said to them. For instance, when he said, you're going to sit on twelve thrones, I don't think I'm going to sit on one of those twelve thrones, even though I'm a Christian. That was specifically to the twelve apostles.

But there are other things like that, that speak to them of their particular privilege, and calling, and authority, which do not apply generally. However, I would say this. I would say anybody who's called to do work like that which the apostles were called to do can probably count on Christ backing them up, even as he backed up the apostles in the work.

That is to say, if I'm called to be a laborer and work at McDonald's and just support missionaries or something, or I'm not going to be able to support very many working at McDonald's, I was going to work at IBM or Hewlett Packard or something and make some money and live modestly and give to missions, and that would be my principle of ministry. I might not be vested with particular power and authority over demons, since that's not my calling. But if I were called to be a missionary and to go out and confront the powers of God, and confront the powers of darkness head on, on a regular basis, I would have to count on the promises Jesus gave to the apostles, who also had to do that, being true to anybody else that Jesus calls to similar ministry.

Now, I don't personally hold to the view that there are apostles today, with the exact authority the apostles had over the church, but I do believe there are certainly people today who are called to ministries that are somewhat analogous to what the apostles did. Missionaries and certain leaders of ministries often are in the position to have to conduct the same kind of ministry that the apostles were engaged in, and I have no doubt. I'll tell you this, if I were called to be a missionary, I'd just go on the assumption that the promises God gave the apostles when they had to do this kind of thing are mine too, if I have to do the same kind of thing, that Christ doesn't send us out without the right equipment.

So I would say that the promises do rest upon the church corporately, and specifically on the apostles as the leaders. But in any generation, the leaders of the church are those who are engaged in the kind of ministry that Christ called the apostles to, could probably count on, I would say can count on, the promises that Jesus made to the apostles, applying at least in so far as they're relevant to their modern calling. There definitely is a particular specialness about what he says to the apostles.

The degree to which its provisions apply to other Christians besides them, I would just say many of the things Jesus gave as blanket authorizations to the apostles don't apply in a blanket fashion to all Christians in all times in various circumstances that are different than the apostles. But I would say that in any case where persons are doing the

work of apostles today, whether we call them apostles or not, that they can count on the same kind of support from Christ, and the same kind of, you know, they can walk in faith as Christ sent the apostles out with these promises, that they can go out with the same promises. You know, when I was in the ministry, I made no distinction between the promises made to the apostles and their application to the church in general.

But one of the reasons I didn't is because I also hadn't really thought through what the distinctives are of the apostles' ministry vis-à-vis that of the average Christian. I was, in my opinion, the average Christian. I was just Joe layman.

I mean, I was not a clergyman. I wasn't a pastor. I wasn't ordained.

Eventually, years later, I was ordained. But I mean, for most of the years of my ministry, in the early days, I wasn't ordained. I had no interest in being ordained.

I was just, in my thinking, I was giving myself, this is the average Christian. And therefore, I thought that, you know, what I did was what basically all Christians ought to be doing. And that, you know, I noticed there were a lot of similarities between what I was doing and the kind of thing that Jesus told the apostles to do.

Now, I, in no sense, have ever dreamed that I'm an apostle. Because I don't even know that there, I don't think there are apostles in that sense today. But I will say this, I always just counted on these promises Jesus made to them as being true to me.

Whenever I faced a demon-possessed person or had to travel by faith or whatever, I just kind of counted on it. You know, I didn't make any distinction. But, and by the way, I was never disappointed.

I never found God to be unfaithful when I counted on Him in these things. So, my thought is that anybody who's in a missionary enterprise or spiritual leadership thing that has any overlap with the kind of thing the apostles were called to do, that in the areas of that overlap, they can also anticipate God's faithfulness to keep the promises that are pertinent to that particular thing. Anyway, that is a good question.

It's a question every Christian should ask. It's not the easiest to answer. But, you know, is this to the apostles only or to all Christians? But, I would say particularly to the apostles and in some extended sense probably to other Christians who find themselves in any parallel situation in the will of God.

Well then, what I'm suggesting here is that Peter was not given a special priority over the other apostles. But the apostles themselves were addressed as having priority in the church and given special authority, symbolically referred to as the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And those keys were involved in their having the right, just as Eliakim had the right to open the doors of the king's house or to close them.

So the keys given to the apostles symbolized the right to bind or to loose, to make the official dictums of the church, and to not have to be challenged by every disagreeable subordinate. I mean, if the apostles decided, that was settled. Okay, now after making these comments, we spent our entire, almost more than an hour now, talking just about those verses today.

And there was a good portion spent yesterday, or last time too. I need to move along. After making these promises to the apostles, he commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

Now, this of course was a temporary restriction. Later on, he wanted them to go tell everyone in the world that he was Jesus the Christ after his resurrection. At this point, however, I think he didn't want them stirring up fleshly zeal and excitement.

There had already been several close calls where people's own messianic fervor had almost led them in a fleshly response to take him forcibly against his will and make him king. And he would just assume that everybody became aware of his being Christ at this point, the same way Peter did. How did Peter know? Because the Father revealed it to him.

Instead of getting people all mixed up with their own ideas of what the Messiah was, and telling them, hey, this Jesus is the Messiah, with all the corresponding misunderstandings that would go with that, he better just let the Father reveal that to people, just like he had to Peter. And at this point, later on when Jesus was gone, and there would be no danger of people making an earthly king out of him, then the apostles could be more bold about it. They'd have more clarity on it themselves, what that meant to be a Messiah, to be the Messiah.

And then they could of course proclaim, and must proclaim Jesus to be the Christ. However, at this point in time, he didn't want them to go out and advertise this. Verse 21.

From that time, Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day. This is the first time of three times that we read of Jesus saying essentially this very thing to them. Three times between now and the cross, he tells them very plainly that he's going to be arrested, killed, and rise on the third day.

The astonishing thing is that the apostles didn't remember this or put stock in it. After they actually saw Jesus crucified, they in no sense were expectant of his resurrection. And even when told of it, they doubted it.

Which means that they must have just been kind of dull. In fact, we can see that they were dull in a sense. Because in verse, well not here I guess, it wasn't here, it was

another place.

After he told them about this very thing, they debated among themselves what he meant by being raised from the dead. They didn't even understand him literally there. Now, Peter took Jesus aside, verse 22, and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall not happen to you.

But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan. You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but of the things of men. Now, Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus said he was going to die and rise again.

Now, apparently the apostles didn't quite catch the rise again part. It's obvious that the idea of dying is the thing that Peter caught on and got stuck with and didn't like and objected to. If he understood that Jesus was going to rise again, then he would probably have less vehemence.

But it must be that Peter felt that Jesus was just indulging a little bit of melancholy pessimism. After all, a great multitude had vanished overnight. Five thousand that had been fed had just dwindled down to almost nothing.

And Jesus was now leading a much less popular campaign. It seems like the peak of his popularity was now in the past, and it was going down somewhat, maybe quickly. And Peter felt that maybe this was just getting to Jesus.

Maybe Jesus was getting a little discouraged, and he needs to realize that we really are on his side. After all, I remember when the five thousand left, he even asked us if we were going to depart too. That Jesus had been getting a little bit too moody, a little melancholy.

We need to affirm to him that all is not lost. There is still hope for the mission. And now Jesus is talking about dying.

This guy is really indulging in some pessimism right now. And so Peter wanted to be a positive confession kind of a guy, and said, Lord, don't speak that negative confession like that. Far be it from you.

This won't happen to you. Peter is making the positive confession, and he thought Jesus was making a negative confession. Actually, Jesus was making what I guess could be called a negative confession, if being arrested and dying is negative.

However, in the purpose of God, it was not a negative thing. It was what God wanted, and therefore it's positive. Which is what is so wrong with the positive confession thing, is because to admit that you're sick or to admit that you're low on finances is seen as a negative confession.

As if there's nothing positive that can be said about being sick or being low on finances. As if suffering has no upside. And suffering is just a bad thing that shouldn't be tolerated.

I mean, the people who are this way, who have this opinion, it's just as Jesus said, you are mindful not of the things of God, but of the things of man. It's man that is concerned about financial prosperity. It's man that's concerned about his physical comfort and health.

Those are not God's principal concerns. If they were, then Jesus should have been the wealthiest and healthiest and the most long-lived man that ever walked. But the fact is, for a man to die young, to live poor and die young, like Jesus did, was maybe not what the apostles thought was a great deal, but then they savored the things of man, not the things of God.

In the plan of God, nothing could be better but for Jesus to have his life cut off early. And what man calls a tragedy, what man calls undesirable, what man hates and avoids at all costs, may be the thing that God sees as the very best thing possible. Remember, it says, Jesus said, I believe it's in Luke 16, I think it's verse 15, I'll just check on that before I give you that.

In Luke 16 and verse 15, at the end of that verse, Jesus said, for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Now, you can see then why it would be so tragic for a Christian to fall into being mindful of the things of man, and not the things of God. The things that man values are the opposite of what God values.

The things that man highly esteems are the things that God least esteems and even negatively esteems. They're an abomination to him. And for a disciple of Jesus Christ to fall into the trap of judging on the basis of human values rather than God's, was a great disaster.

In fact, it called forth probably the strongest rebuke Jesus gave to anyone in all his ministry. On many occasions, he rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy in words that must have been scathing and stinging. In fact, when you read his rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees, if you can really picture yourself as there at the time, you can realize how uncomfortable it would have been even just to be there, just because you'd be so embarrassed for them being so raked over the coals like that in public.

And yet, what Jesus said to them doesn't hold a candle to the rebuke he gave Peter. He called him Satan. At least the scribes and Pharisees were just called hypocrites.

But he called Peter Satan. Get behind me, Satan. Now, does this mean that Peter was demon possessed? No, I think not.

Does it mean that he was speaking for Satan? Possibly. If it does mean he was speaking for Satan, or that Satan was speaking through Peter, there is a slight difficulty. And that

would be simply that the content of what Peter is saying would seem to be discouraging the cross.

Now, why would that be a problem to see it that way? Well, in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, Paul indicates that the secret wisdom of God manifested in the cross was something the rulers of this world did not understand. And it says, if they had, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of Glory. I'm talking about 1 Corinthians 2, verse 7 and following.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Now, it sounds like if Satan or the rulers of this world, and most would understand this to mean the demonic rulers, if they had understood God's strategy, they would have never cooperated. If they had understood how much damage the cross was going to do to them, they would never have gone through with crucifying Christ.

And the fact that they did crucify Christ suggests that they didn't have a clue that this crucifixion was going to be so damaging to them. Now, if that's the case, if Satan and the demons didn't have a clue that the crucifixion was going to turn out for their doom, then why would Satan wish to dissuade Christ from going to the cross? If Satan is speaking through Peter saying, don't go to the cross, don't go to the cross, then that would suggest that Satan knew that the cross was going to be a bummer for him, and he wanted to prevent it. Now, my thought is, we have to assume not only on the basis of 1 Corinthians 2, but on other considerations that Satan did not know that the cross was going to be a victory for Christ and a defeat for Satan.

I believe Satan could not have known that. And the reason is because Satan played an active role in the crucifixion. We're told specifically that Satan filled Judas' heart to go and turn him in.

In the 12th chapter, I think, of John, it says that after Jesus rebuked Judas, because Judas had complained about the lady who poured perfume over Jesus' head, it says then Satan filled Judas' heart and he went and betrayed Jesus. Now, Judas' turning Christ over to his crucifiers was by Satan's instigation. And although we're not told it specifically, I think we can assume that all of the murderous actions of the Sanhedrin and of the Romans and all the injustices done were certainly inspired by the devil.

They're not the kind of thing the devil objects to, generally speaking, and the devil seems to have been pushing for this. Which means the devil didn't know that the cross was going to be a disaster for the devil. The devil was in favor of the cross up to the point before Jesus rose up again from the dead.

Now, if the devil favored the cross and didn't see it as a problem to himself, why would the devil inspire Peter to try to persuade Jesus not to go to the cross? This is a hard

question to answer. It's possible that when Jesus calls Peter Satan, he doesn't mean to identify Peter with the person that we call Satan, who is the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. The word Satan itself, actually in the Old Testament, was not a proper name at all.

It is a Hebrew word. Satan is a Hebrew word, not a Greek word. And it appears in the Old Testament a few times, but every time it appears, it is always with the definite article, the, the Satan.

It's not translated that way in our Bibles very often. Some of the modern translations translate it that way. But in the Hebrew, whenever it talks about Satan, when Satan came and accused Job to God, or when Satan stood and resisted Joshua the high priest, in the Hebrew it says the Satan, the Satan.

And the name Satan, the word Satan in Hebrew means adversary. So that actually, it is possible in those passages in the Old Testament that talk about Satan, to simply translate the adversary, because Satan means adversary. Now, Satan actually takes on the force of an actual proper name in the New Testament.

The New Testament is written in Greek, but it maintains this Hebrew word as a name for the devil, Satan. And that being so, we know that Satan is a personal being and not just a generic adversary. However, it's possible that Jesus was saying to Peter, you are acting the part of an adversary to me.

You're like a Satan to me. Not that Satan, the actual devil himself, was putting the words into Peter's mouth, though that could be the case, but it's hard to know why Satan would do so. But that Peter himself was playing the role of a Satan, that is an adversary to Jesus.

As far as Peter was thinking that he was playing the role of a loyal supporter, he was in fact being adversarial. He was in fact working against Christ. And that could be essentially how this is meant when Jesus calls him Satan.

Basically, he's just calling him adversary. Although it's perhaps hard to explain why he'd use the Hebrew word Satan, instead of us finding here the Greek word for it. But then, you know, Jesus and his disciples did speak Aramaic, and while most of their words are translated into Greek in the Gospel, some of them are not.

Some are left in the Hebrew or the Aramaic. In a few cases, this may be one of those, I don't know. In any case, it creates a few problems.

And it is either the case that Satan is speaking through Peter, and that's what Jesus is acknowledging by saying, get behind me, Satan. Or else, he's simply saying, Peter, you are an adversary to me. You are saying that you are as much in opposition to the purposes of God as Satan is.

In making this kind of statement. Now, Satan might not at that point in time be opposed to the cross, but he was certainly opposed to God and to Christ. And he could be saying, you too, Peter, are like a Satan, an adversary to me.

And I find it interesting that he doesn't say, because you are mindful of the things of the devil, and not the things of God. He says, you are mindful of the things of man, and not the things of God. He doesn't say, you know, you are inspired by the devil, and your thoughts are demonic, and your tastes and your concerns are those of the devil himself.

He says, your tastes and your concerns and your mind is on things that are human. You are seeing things from a human perspective, and that in itself is adversarial to the kingdom of God. Because the things of God and the things of man are separate.

Man always would avoid the cross. Any of us would, if we had the choice, avoid dying at the cross, or any other painful way. Or any of us would desire for our friends to escape such a fate, or our loved ones to escape such a fate.

Peter's reaction to the news that Jesus would die is natural enough. Any friend would wish that his dear friend would not die. But that's just the problem, it was natural.

It was failing to see God's plan and God's concerns. It was reacting as natural men do, rather than perceiving the higher good in this seemingly negative situation. And this is the case.

We could speak of the cross by extension. You know, the cross and the life of the believer. As any negative thing that is incurred in the Christian life, any unpleasant and suffering thing, that is incurred by the believer as a result of his loyalty to Christ.

Christ went to the cross because he would not violate the will of his Father. He said, Father, if it's your will, let this cup pass from me, if it's possible, but not my will, but yours be done. If Jesus had not surrendered his will to the Father, he could have avoided the cross.

The reason he went to the cross is because he wouldn't put his will above that of the Father. Your cross is the point at which your will crosses God's will. And if you surrender to the will of God, any special suffering that comes to you as a result of that surrender, could in a sense be by extension called your cross.

Now, it's not your cross if you have an offensive mother-in-law. It's not your cross if you marry somebody who is hard to live with, or something like that. That's not the cross that you have to bear.

But any suffering that comes upon you because of your refusal to compromise, because you insist on doing the will of God rather than your own will, and you incur thereby pain or suffering, that can be your cross. Well, humans don't like crosses. But God knows that

crosses are good for people.

Jesus said you need to take up your cross daily to follow me. It's good for the purpose of God for us to bear a cross. Now, is sickness a cross? Not necessarily always, but it can be.

When Paul had his thorn in the flesh, whatever that might have been, he prayed three times that it would go away. He obviously didn't see it as a cross he had to bear. He wanted to get rid of it.

Most sicknesses probably can be viewed that way. It's something that God wants us eventually to get over. Maybe he wants to heal us right now.

That's perhaps a safe assumption in most cases. But when God specifically said to him, Well, no, I'll give you grace. It's good for you to be weakened by this thing.

My strength has made perfect your weakness. Then Paul had a choice. Is he going to surrender his will to God's will and resign himself to it? Or is he going to resist this and be bitter and angry at God? Or what? Well, obviously he decided to resign himself to the will of God and say, Okay, my will is to have this thorn removed, but God's will is for me to have it.

Therefore, I'll embrace it. I'll accept it. And forever afterwards, his suffering of that thorn was, in a sense, a cross that was his because of his surrender to the will of God and because of God's work in his life.

Sickness can be that way. I'm not saying that all sickness is. But it certainly cannot be said that all sickness is outside the will of God because God may have a good purpose in it.

And Paul said of his thorn, three times he said this happened so that he might not be exalted above measure. That obviously is God's concern, that Paul should not be exalted above measure. And therefore, the thorn of the flesh was given to prevent that from happening.

Okay, then Jesus goes on. Verse 24, Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. We talked a lot about verse 28.

I have a feeling we won't talk too much about it. I won't take too much time on it now because we've talked about the various ways that could be understood. It'll perhaps be worth mentioning again when we talk about the transfiguration in our next session.

But let's talk about especially verses 24 through 27. Now, Jesus had just said in verse 21 that he was going to die and rise again. Peter objected to the death motif of Jesus' teaching, and he said, no, this is certainly not a good thing.

And Jesus now turns to all the disciples, including Peter, and says, well, it looks like we need to readjust our thinking here a little bit. You resist the idea of a cross. You resist the idea of suffering.

You resist the idea of death. Well, let me reorientate you a little bit here. If anyone's going to follow me, he's got to accept a cross.

He's got to accept death. If he seeks to save his life, he'll lose it. But if he will lose his life for my sake, he'll find it forever.

And so Jesus is basically trying to turn around their wrong perception and perspective on this and say, listen, don't you know that to follow me is going to cost you your life? And that shouldn't be considered so unique because whatever a person pursues is going to cost them their life. No one's getting out of here alive. Everyone's going to die one way or another.

Some people will die for their drinking habit. Some will die for their homosexual life choices. They'll get AIDS and die for that.

Some people will die for their choice of a violent life and gang involvement or whatever. I mean, people die for causes all the time. And some people just die in the pursuit of the only thing that matters to them, and that's survival.

Just trying to survive, but eventually age catches up and everyone dies eventually. To die for Jesus is no tragedy at all. In fact, the only time death is not a tragedy is when you die in the will of God.

The greatest tragedy that can come to a person would be that they die outside the will of God or even live apart from the will of God. If God wants you to die and you somehow manage to live, then you have not done yourself a favor or the purposes of God a favor. If you seek to save your life... Now, by the way, what does he mean by seeking to save your life? Does it mean that it's wrong for you, for instance, to look both ways before you cross the street? Or that it's wrong for you to get an operation if you have a cancerous growth and it can be removed? If you do that, you're trying to save your life.

Is that a bad deal? What about eating? Don't you eat in order to save your life? Is that wrong? Obviously not. His statement has to be taken in its proper setting. What he

means by that is, of course, if you seek by compromising your obedience to God to save your life.

That is to say, if your life is on the line, and the only way to save it would be by compromising what you're supposed to do and not doing the right thing, then it's better for you to lose your life by not compromising, because then you'll find it for eternal life, than to preserve your life by compromise, because then you lose something which is more eternal, something of greater value. So, of course, he means by this, if you lose your life because you will not compromise your convictions, that's great. You'll find it, like eternal.

But if you save your life by compromising your convictions, then you'll lose something even more valuable, and that is your soul. What will a man give in exchange for his soul? In Hebrews chapter 11, where it talks about a number of persons in the Old Testament who were tortured and died and imprisoned and so forth, it says in verse 35, in Hebrews 11, 35, it says, And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance.

What does it mean, they were not accepting deliverance? Is it that someone said, listen, we want to let you go, and you say, no, no, torture me again, please. That's not what's being suggested here. Everyone I know in the Bible who was being tortured and were given their freedom, took it.

But not accepting deliverance in this case means they would not accept relief on the terms that was available to them. In the cases he's talking about, he's talking about prophets who were killed for not compromising their word. Later, the apostles would have faced the same kind of thing.

They'd die because they would not compromise. Now, they could have delivered themselves by compromise. If Jeremiah had said, okay, I'm sorry, I won't preach anymore these words, he would have lived out a natural lifetime.

But that was too costly. That was deliverance at too great a cost. To save his life through disobeying God wasn't worth it.

And therefore, he refused deliverance, as did Isaiah and other prophets in the Old Testament, and Jesus himself, and the apostles too. They refused deliverance from their torments because the terms of deliverance would be that they must compromise their convictions, and they simply wouldn't pay that price. They would not compromise.

And therefore, by their obstinance, by their stubbornness, by their insisting that they would obey God rather than man and seek God's pleasure rather than their own, they refused by that choice. Deliverance that would have been theirs had they compromised and renounced what they believed. Well, to seek to save your life by compromise is not

good.

You'll lose it doing that. And when he says, what, is a man profited if he loses his own soul and gains the whole world? And what will he give in exchange for his soul? I mean, this question is rhetorical. There's no answer to it.

A man won't give anything in exchange for his life. The word soul can be translated life, and it is in some translations. But to gain the whole world and lose your soul, you haven't profited at all.

And this is because of the relative difference between that which is temporal and that which is eternal, of course. Now, when Jesus said, and I didn't comment specifically on this in verse 24, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Maybe I should make a few comments on that, and then we have to close.

Deny himself should not be necessarily equated with what we nowadays commonly call self-denial, although it sounds like the same thing. The term self-denial today usually means something like fasting or asceticism, you know, just refusing legitimate enjoyments for religious purposes. People who sleep on a bed of nails or go on long fasts or, you know, refuse comforts unnecessarily, they are practicing what would often be called self-denial.

But that's not what it means to deny yourself, because persons can be practicing this, what we call self-denial, and still be very self-centered in the whole thing. They can be doing it as a mask for pride. In fact, Paul says that himself in Colossians chapter 2. I'm aware that we should have quit a few moments ago.

We'll quit in just a minute here. The tape player. Well, no we won't.

We're out of time now. In Colossians chapter 2, I'll just have to exceed...