

Golden Cage

#0546

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—August 31, 1968

Let us turn this morning to the 16th chapter of Matthew, beginning with the 21st verse. I'm always glad when we can listen to the words of Jesus as He spoke them to His disciples when he was here in the world. The Christian life is more than many take it to be. To many, religion should keep us out of the penitentiary, out of the police court, out of the nightclubs and the gambling dens, and as long as possible out of the cemetery. But there is another side to religion, as we shall see in our text this morning:

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” Matthew 16:21.

Now, here was the Master, who knew all things and could foresee everything, plainly telling His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem. And that when He went up there, He was going to be betrayed and denied, rejected, beaten and crucified.

Well, of course, common sense would say, “Why go, if you know that that's what's ahead of you?”

As I said a moment ago, to many people, religion is supposed to be a way of keeping out of trouble. And here He was telling them that He was going right into rebel, right into the thick of the very worst trouble.

Now, you notice Peter's reaction:

“Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying,
Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee”
Matthew 16:22.

And as men would look at it, that was a very reasonable response.

In other words, “Take care of yourself, Lord. Take better care of yourself than that. If that's what's awaiting you at Jerusalem, keep away from Jerusalem. Don't walk into trouble.”

Now, notice Jesus' response to Peter's response:

“But He...” Matthew 16:23.

That is, Jesus.

“...turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me,
Satan: thou art an offense unto Me: for thou savourest not
the things that be of God, but those that be of men”
Matthew 16:23.

In other words, “Peter, you’re talking like men talk, not like God thinks. You do not see the vision, Peter.”

And if you read back in the chapter, you’ll find that just a few moments before, Jesus had commended Peter for his glorious vision of the Messiahship of Christ. Yes, Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God, and to Peter’s mind, that was of all reasons the best for His avoiding any such experience as awaited Him at Jerusalem.

Now, to show that this was given not just for that occasion and not just for those few people there, the 24th verse says:

“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Matthew 16:24–26.

This is one of those divine paradoxes which we love to study if the Holy Spirit leads our minds, in which we find simply riddles unless the Holy Spirit is leading us.

“...Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it” Matthew 16:25.

May I tell you, friends, that one of the greatest longings of my heart is to see people happy, and I know the only way they can be supremely happy, eternally happy, is to take heaven’s way. So many people spend so much of life finding out that what they thought they wanted does not satisfy. And all the while, the One who made us and knows our inner longings offers us the path of life.

But the difficulty is two things. The path that Jesus offers us seems to take away the things we think we want, and it seems to offer in their stead things that we are quite certain we don’t want.

I wonder, “What’s the matter?”

Well, I’ll tell you what the matter is, friends. It wasn’t always this way. In Heaven for ages everybody was happy doing exactly what he wanted to do and there was no cross, no cross at all. Why couldn’t it go on that way? Because Lucifer decided to go ahead with a different program. There are only two principles in the universe. There *can* only be two. One is love, the other is selfishness. And love is not selfishness, and selfishness is not love. And for 6,000 years, Lucifer has been

seeking to demonstrate the superiority of selfishness. Personally, I don't think he's done a very good job of it, do you?

But the strange thing is that he convinces most of each generation that if they will only give him a chance, *this* time he's going to make it, *this* time he's going to make them happy. *This* time, if they'll only eat of the forbidden fruit, they'll be more beautiful than ever, more wise than ever, more happy than ever.

As one of my friends has put it, "We learn little, and we learn slowly."

And here is Jesus with these twelve men whom He has chosen personally to represent Him, and He's been with them now most of the period of His ministry. The day of His death is approaching, and still, He hasn't been able to help them to understand what it is all about.

To them, as to many today, religion should keep us out of trouble, and here was a Man going right *into* trouble. What was the matter with Him? Couldn't they help Him some way to see a better view of things? They tried. And He tried all the harder to turn them from their efforts to help Him. He wanted to help them.

Are we this morning trying to help God to keep us out of trouble? Are we trying to avoid the cross? Are we trying to convince our Savior that we do enough if we keep out of the bad things?

May I remind you, friends, that this principle we are studying is the basis of the plan of salvation, for Jesus did not leave anything bad when He left Heaven. He did not give up any *wrong* thing when He came to earth. He gave up the *good* things. He did not give up *bad* things so *He* could be saved. He gave up *good* things so *we* could be saved. This is what He's talking about here.

The call of the Master is the call to devote the life to sacrificial service and then to crown it all, if need be, with sacrificial death.

"...If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" Matthew 16:24–25.

I think of David Livingstone. After years of earnest effort and self-denial beyond what most of us know, he at last received a doctor's degree. And he could have had high and important positions, but there was a call in his heart. Africa called, Africa called. And there, he gave his life away. His heart is still in Africa. His body lies in Westminster Abbey, surrounded with the great of the ages past in Great Britain's history.

Did he throw his life away when, tortured by fever, he had to journey on through those tropical jungles with no one of his own race or nation to minister to him? Was he a fool? A failure? No. He was one of those who knew the mystery that we are studying this morning.

“...Whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it”
Matthew 16:25.

I don't think David Livingstone was ever sorry one minute for the life that God had called him into. And my dear friends, the answer to you and me this morning is not that all of us should catch the next boat for Africa. That isn't the answer. The answer is that Jesus has a specific plan for every life, which few people ever find and fewer ever carry out.

Do you know why? They are too selfish. They are too selfish. This is what Jesus was trying to expose in the lives of those disciples, that they might seek Him not merely for a revelation but for power to cure that selfishness. It took the tragedy of Gethsemane and Calvary to do that, friends. And that cured them, thank God. That's what it'll take to cure us. We shall have to linger with our Savior under the olive trees. We shall have to follow Him to the judgment hall. We shall have to behold Him as He's nailed to that cross and watch with Him through those weary hours as His life ebbs away.

And then, when we understand that it isn't just bootlegging and murder, it isn't just rioting and violence that caused His death. The basic thing is this selfishness inherent in human nature.

And I want to tell you something, my friends. The selfishness that is most abhorrent to God is religious selfishness, sanctimonious selfishness, the selfishness that finds its satisfaction in keeping out of the penitentiary, in keeping out of trouble, keeping out of scandal, and living a good, normal citizen's life with all the good things of life, nothing bad, no trouble, no scandal. And at last, like the rich man in the story that Jesus told, finding oneself in hell, with Lazarus clear across the gulf in Abraham's bosom. For my dear friends, covetousness, selfishness, pride—these are the sins that are most abhorrent to God.

My dear old friend, Elder Luther Warren, who's been sleeping many years, as he spoke to young people when I was a boy, he used to use this expression, “Play fair with God. Play fair with God.”

Do you know what will happen, my dear friends, if you and I will play fair with God?

If we will go to God and say, “All right, Jesus. You gave everything for me. I'll give everything for you. Now, what do you want me to do?”

If we will play fair with God and be honest with Him and let Him have everything we have, He will lead us into paths that are not of our choosing.

And somebody says, “That's just what I'm afraid of.”

And my dear friends, as long as you're afraid of it, you will never know the mystery, and you will never know the glory, and you will never know the joy.

Oh, I pray that in some heart this morning there will be awakened the spirit of David Livingstone, the spirit of Paul, the spirit of Joseph Bates, the spirit of the Master. Heaven is waiting to pour out its richest and best gifts to and through those who withhold nothing.

How is it that it is put?

“There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who by putting self aside makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God” *Desire of Ages*, page 159.

You know, the Savior Himself had to meet this temptation. Did you know that? I’m going to read you something interesting here from *Desire of Ages*, page 486. Listen carefully. Unless you’ve already read this particular page and pondered over it, here is something that may come as a revelation, that Christ had to meet this particular temptation in this way that’s mentioned here.

“To the heart of Christ it was a bitter task to press His way against the fears, disappointment, and unbelief of His beloved disciples. It was hard to lead them forward to the anguish and despair that awaited them at Jerusalem. And Satan was at hand to press his temptations upon the Son of man” *Ibid.*, page 486.

Now, listen to the word “why” repeated like a refrain. These are the temptations of Satan, mind you, pressing the heart of the Son of God.

“Why should He now go to Jerusalem, to certain death? All around Him were souls hungering for the bread of life. On every hand were suffering ones waiting for His word of healing. The work to be wrought by the gospel of His grace was but just begun. And He was full of the vigor of manhood’s prime. Why not go forward to the vast fields of the world with the words of His grace, the touch of His healing power? Why not take to Himself the joy of giving life and gladness to those darkened and sorrowing millions? Why leave the harvest gathering to His disciples, so weak in faith, so dull of understanding, so slow to act? Why face death now, and leave the work in infancy?” *Ibid.*

Who was pressing those lies on Jesus? Satan. And my dear friend, he will do it with you. When God presents to you a call, an invitation, a challenge, don’t forget there’ll be a cross in it. And don’t forget there’ll be an enemy who will show you a field where you can labor, supposedly at least, without so much cross. Don’t forget that.

He will show you a way to live where you can be more comfortable, more respected, more recognized and better paid. This is what He offered to Jesus. This

is what he offered to the disciples. But Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. He knew that for Him, life meant the cross. And He invites each one of us to that same experience.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul” Mark 8:36.

Oh, can a person lose his soul simply by trying to do the Lord’s work in a way that is convenient and comfortable and avoids the difficulties and the troubles and the crosses? Indeed. This is the trap in which many of the remnant are being caught. The challenge of the cross is the same today as it was when Jesus spoke the words of our text.

And why must it be this way? Because selfishness is a disease, virulent, malignant, that must be cured. And the only way it can be cured is through the cross. That’s why Jesus had to take the cross in order that He might reveal to us the hideous, terrible character of selfishness.

And as we approach the cross and share with Him in the sorrow for selfishness, we too shall be glad to give our lives that others may enter into this fellowship, the fellowship of this mystery. Oh, that God may help us to do it. And I plead with you. Do not listen to the rationalizations of men or devils that would lead you from this principle. Please, for Jesus’ sake.

You know, I was thinking about it. Suppose we had a cage here this morning. Can you just imagine a cage, an iron cage with steel bars? There’s a door in it. You can see out through it. There are bars there. There’s a lock.

And here’s the gatekeeper, and he says to you, “If you are willing to spend the rest of your life in this cage, I will give you a million dollars.”

How many of you would go in? Ah, but he gets no takers.

So, he says, “Well, I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’ll change these bars from steel to silver. They’ll glisten and sparkle. Here is a silver cage, and we’ll up the price—two million dollars if you’ll spend the rest of your life in this cage.”

Is there a man, a woman, a boy, or a girl that steps forward and says, “Yes, give me the two million. I’ll go in. Lock the door, and I’ll stay here. Of course, you’ll feed me”?

“Oh yes,” he says, “I’ll feed you.”

Would you go? Would you go?

“Ah,” but he says, “we’ll make those bars golden bars.”

Think what it would mean to live in a golden cage. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? Wonderful?

Ah, my friends, we laugh at the absurdity of it all, but this is exactly what millions are doing. And they're not even getting a golden cage. And for a lot less than a million or two million, they are selling their lives in slavery to selfishness. That's it, that's it.

But if the music is loud enough and the bars are gilded enough, and the food is tantalizing enough with the spices and the smell of Egypt, some people still think that to leave that cage would be to leave security. After all, prisoners do get fed three times a day.

“And what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul” Mark 8:36.

I know this, friends. When we stand at judgment day and everybody in this universe is there, and the drama of the ages is unfolded on the canvas of the sky, everybody will wish he had chosen the path that Jesus opened up. Everybody will wish that. Everybody will recognize then that the best way is the way of Calvary.

But if we accept it this morning, we must do it by faith and love—faith that the One who made us knows best what will satisfy us; love for the One who gave all for us, that we would rather die *with* Him than live without Him.

Oh, I pray that some heart this morning may be torn from the idols (can I call them anything less) that have interposed between the heart and Him. For idols need not be some ugly objects fashioned of wood and stone. They may be beautiful plans, wonderful desires. Anything that keeps you from the road of the cross: that is an idol, my friends, that is an idol. Oh, I pray that the Holy Spirit may apply to our hearts these wonderful, wonderful truths.

You notice in what I've read here from *Desire of Ages* that Jesus was tempted by the enemy with the thought, “Why not go ahead with Your work of preaching and healing instead of going up there to die?”

Why did Satan tempt Him with such a temptation? Did Satan want Him to go on teaching and healing? He was perfectly willing for Him to do that if that was the way that would appeal to Him to divert Him from the Father's plan.

Satan didn't offer Him a cigar or a glass of whiskey. Satan didn't suggest to Him how nice it would be to run down to a nightclub or a theater. He tempted Him with wonderful suggestions about how to do His work better and more successfully.

These are the temptations that he brings to you and me today. Oh, for Jesus' sake, let us pray for a revelation of the cross. What do you say? Let us be willing to take the blood-stained path.

You know, in these vesper studies from weekend to weekend, we've been studying this problem of survival. And I think this is one of the greatest texts in the Bible on survival:

“And whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it”
Matthew 16:25.

These are the survivors, my friend. And in all ages, the children of God have walked a narrow path. But this is particularly so of the remnant. We’re going into the narrowest path that has ever opened up before the people of God.

So, let us prepare to bleed with Jesus. Let us accept the preparatory experiences into which He calls us. Let us be willing to turn from the recognition of the world, the remuneration of the world, the applause of the world, and even of our own friends. And let us choose for Jesus the way of the cross.

This may be in things that seem very little. It may be in standing true to a responsibility where trials and difficulties are all about. It may be continuing in a thorny path when just over the way (over that stile, you remember, in Pilgrim’s Progress) is an easy road. But oh, to the one who has heard the call of Jesus and answered it, there is but one question.

“Where is my Master? I want to be with Him.”

“Where is my Master? I want to be with Him.”

And I’ll tell you where we’ll find Him, friends. We’ll find Him where the battle is the hottest, where the trials are the greatest, where the sacrifice is the most difficult. Shall we join Him? What do you say?

Now, I want to hear from you.

[Recording ended in progress]

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