KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material
Matthew 16:21-28
Week of 24th of March
Take up your cross

WARMUP

Share as a group your responses to some of these situations:

- Something I thought I would never recover from .
- This is when I really grasped what it meant that Jesus died on the cross for me:
- An unexpected good that came out of a bad situation. . .
- A dream that I have left behind. . .
- I feel lonely when. . .
- How do you motivate yourself to do a task you dread?
- What is one thing you've tried that you never want to do again?

After Peter identified Jesus as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God,'
"The obvious solution would be this: march on Jerusalem, pick up supporters on the way, choose your moment, say your prayers, fight a surprise battle, take over the temple, and install Jesus as king. That's how God's kingdom will come! That's how 'the son of man' will be exalted in his kingdom! That, we may be sure, was something like what they had in mind.

Jesus' proposal is a through-the looking-glass version of this. Yes, we'll be going to Jerusalem. Yes, the kingdom of God is coming, coming soon now. Yes, the son of man will be exalted as king, dispensing Justice to the world. But the way to this kingdom is by the exact opposite road to the one the disciples—and especially Peter—have in mind. It will involve suffering and death. Jesus will indeed confront the rulers and authorities, the chief priests and legal experts, in Jerusalem; but they, not he, will appear to win the battle. He will then be raised from the dead, so Jesus says; but neither Peter nor the others can figure out for the moment what he might mean by this.

NT Wright

Leader preparation:

Prepare to lead the group by reading through Matthew 16:21-28, and the notes on pages 19 and 20.

This week we are focusing on the seeming contradictions of Jesus: a king riding on a donkey, choosing to give up our lives to find them, God dying at the hands of his creation. It is easy for people to speak of fleeting illnesses and inconveniences as "taking up their cross". Try to challenge them to think deeper, to identify the places where we "do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns".

Make sure your time isn't taken up only by answering questions, but that you have time to pray and care for one another too.

Whether your group takes a break over the Easter holidays or continues meeting, encourage your members to be part of our church services or other reminders of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

Read Matthew 16:21-28

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Take up your cross

Look at each aspect of what Jesus anticipates in verse 21. Why do you think each of these components was important?

What about Jesus' predictions didn't seem right to Peter?

What wrong assumptions do we (or other people) make about what it should be like to follow Jesus here on earth? What does Jesus say we should expect it to be like when we follow him?

Why do these incorrect assumptions—of Peter, and perhaps sometimes of us—get such a harsh response from Jesus?

What does it mean in your life, in practical terms, to "deny yourself" and "take up your cross."

What are some of the harshnesses you expect you may face as a follower of Jesus in the world? What are some of the situations that cause people to abandon their faith?

How can you prepare yourself to stand firm when you find yourself in difficulty or suffering?

What is your greater hope beyond the suffering or difficulties that you may face? How do you hold on to hope in difficult times?

Thinking ahead

The song, "Mary did you know?" has become very popular in recent years at Christmastime.

https://tinyurl.com/4fas8j9w

Some people have pointed out that Mary did have at least some idea of what Jesus would suffer! Think of what it meant to who were part of Jesus' life as the cross drew near: for Jesus himself, for Mary, and for the disciples in occasional flashes of insight.

MARY KNEW

Preparing our hearts in advance can make a big difference to our response when suffering arises. Asking God to train us to recognize that we are being tested can help. We need to repeatedly remind ourselves that God's purposes are the priority, not our own ambitions. We should commit to following Jesus in advance even in difficulties. Having people around us to strengthen us and hold us accountable through hard times can make all the difference. Take time to pray with each other, for strength to be faithful and to lay down our own lives for God.

Lord Jesus

Your life is an example to us of willing sacrifice.

Still, we are surprised when things don't go the way we think they should.

Would you work in our hearts to prepare us to face whatever tests may come our way.

Help us to build firmly on the rock solid foundation of your truth, so that we cannot easily be shaken.

Graft us deeply within your love so that the fruit we bear glorifies you.

Help us to take on our role in your family so that we are surrounded by others who can strengthen and support us.

In that moment when a trial arises, allow us to focus our eyes on you ahead of us, carrying your cross, and knowing that as we follow you in sacrifice, so we will rise with you into a new and glorious life.

Amen