

NO!

Matthew 16:21-28

²¹*From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

²²*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

²³*Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

²⁴*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? Or what can you give in exchange for your soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward everyone according to what they have done.*

²⁸*”Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*
[TNIV]

BUT, MUM!

“No!” said Mum to her little girl.

“But, Mum! everyone’s got one!” said her daughter; referring, of course, to the latest toy.

All of us have had someone say no to us over something. And sometimes that No hurts, or we think it is unfair, or we are just disappointed.

God says No to us. And often we struggle to accept God saying no to us. What we have to realize is that God says No because he has something far better for us.

NO HERO, PETER! BUT A SAVIOUR.

Peter heard God’s “No!” very clearly from Jesus: “Get behind me Satan!”

Peter did not like Jesus’ talk about suffering and dying. Peter, like most of the Jews of that time, wanted a hero to rescue their

nation from Roman rule. They wanted someone who would wield a big shiny sword covered in the blood of their enemies. They wanted a hero. And for all Peter's time with Jesus, and seeing what Jesus was about, Peter still thought of heroes and nations.

I suppose none of us are that different. There is still a very strong streak of hero worshipping when it comes to Jesus. We want someone in our lives who can change the world, including ourselves. Someone to look up to and imitate. Someone to change us – change our bad habits or frequent difficulties. Someone to make us healthy, wealthy and wise – make us a real success in life.

Some Christian groups, by the way, would claim that lack of change is proof that the Holy Spirit is not a power in one's life. But I tend to see the sense in Martin Luther's words about Baptism: that every day is a day of repentance, every day the old self should die and a new self should rise to walk with Christ. It may well be we don't see much Spiritual growth at all, only the same old struggle every day between the 'old self' and the 'new self in Christ'.

But then, Christ did not come into the world to be a hero. He came to be our Saviour.

That's why Jesus told off Peter. For Peter's talk was really Satan's talk. It was the talk of glory seeking and hero worshipping. But Christ came to be our Saviour, and that meant suffering and dying for sin, and rising into glory.

And that gives us real hope. I don't know if any Christian's life is vastly superior because one is in Christ. But I do know we are saved!

NO TO SELF, BUT YES TO A CROSS

Jesus' next "No" is addressed to all people who would follow him. "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me."

Jesus' words fly in the face of our society's attitude. We have been taught very strongly to discover oneself - that is, one's personality, and abilities, and interests and self-worth, and so on. People far more readily talk about their rights than about their responsibilities. And that's true for teenagers talking about their "right to be out at night in the city", or for adults talking about the "right to own a gun" or the "right to do what one pleases

with one's own body”.

But Christ ignores this matter of rights and responsibilities. He talks rather of a deeper meaning to life. We are here not to live for ourselves, but for each other. In particular, we are here to live for God! And if we don't have the focus of our lives outside of ourselves, then we will become nothing but shallow lumps of clay: “those who want to save their lives will lose them”.

But many people do experience the truth that losing one's life for the sake of God and other people is truly the way of finding life in the full.

On a deeper level, this passage is also about being right with God and living with him for ever. And this is where we must realize that we have nothing and are nothing such that God should have any regard for us at all or owe us eternal life. Rather, as St Paul says, we have to realise that in Christ we have everything we need before God: dead to sin, and life itself, all as a gift of God's mercy. That means we have somehow shared in his cross, that we may also share in his glory.

NO TO THE WORLD, BUT YES TO LIFE

Finally, Jesus said “No!” to the world: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

What Christ is saying here is quite amazing.

Think of it this way: What are you worth? How would you measure your self worth? By total value of your property? By your standing in the community? By the status of your job?

But consider how God measures you because of his love for you.

Imagine you are standing on one tray in a huge balance. On the other tray is the whole world - all its riches, everything. How would you think the scale would tip?

I suppose most of us would think the whole world would far outweigh oneself. But in God's measuring each of us is worth far more than the whole world.

In a way, when Jesus was saying *What good will it be for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?* he was saying that our life is worth more to God than all the world riches!

And if you think of it, that's rather ironic. A lot of people live as though their only purpose is to possess as much of the world

as possible, if not the whole lot. How often have you spent a sleepless night because you were worried about losing your patch of the world?

But if we can see ourselves with God's eyes - that we are worth more than any amount of earthly treasures, then possessing it seems like a silly thing to aim for, and to worry over the little bit we have is just as silly. For there is something far more valuable than owning the earth, and that's to "own" Jesus; or more precisely, to be "owned" by him.

A lot of people strive for happiness. They think they will find it when the house-debt is paid off, or they can finally own a BMW, or a holiday house at the beach, or marry just the right person, or have just the right job, or their health improves, and so on. But true happiness is never found in this world. It is only in Jesus.

And even then, God's Word doesn't talk so much about happiness, but about joy. It's the joy we can have, even when we don't possess any part of the world at all, but we know we are right with God, that God loves us, and that our Saviour is always with us.

GOD'S NO = YES

So God does say "No!" to us. No to being our hero. No to self-glorying. And No to world-possessing.

But in saying No God also says "Yes!" Yes to being our Saviour. Yes to the warmth of love, even if it means a cross. And Yes to being God's greatest treasure.

So when you feel like you need a hero, know that you have a Saviour. When you feel you need to push for your human rights, know that showing love is being truly human the way God's wants us to be human. And when you feel you don't have enough or that you have been shown a "raw deal", know the joy that can only be found in Jesus.

Amen.