

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 16:21-28

Year A - Proper 17, Text: Matthew 16:21-28
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This pericope follows immediately on what happened on Matthew 16:13–16, where Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah. As mentioned in the previous commentary, these verses should really be understood as part of the same story.

Verses 16:21–23: Jesus predicts His coming passion, and His eventual return to life. Peter rebukes Jesus, and says that the thought of Jesus giving up His life is totally unacceptable. In 16:23, Jesus tells Peter that he is on the side of the devil!

Satan is the primary example of the tempter, who seeks to lead people away from trust in God. He has already approached Jesus directly as an adversary (Matthew 4); now he is attacking Jesus through a beloved friend.

Verses 16:24–26: Jesus tells the disciples that they are to take up their cross and follow Him. Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who find life “for Jesus’ sake” (i.e. they devote themselves to following Jesus in life-long servanthood) will find it. They will find it by giving it away in service to others, full-time, in all that they think, do, and say. After all, people may gain possession of the whole world but forfeit their life in the process.

Much is to be gained by pondering the prediction–confusion–clarification elements in Matthew’s three “Passion Prediction” narratives:

- Matthew 16:13–16, 21–23
- Matthew 17:22–23 (see also 18:1–5)
- Matthew 20:17–23

The disciples understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but did not understand what being a disciple of Jesus would mean for them. Their eyes would be opened only after Jesus’ resurrection when they would “see” the Risen Lord in Galilee (Mark 16:1–8).

The question for us, God’s people today, is: “Although we believe in Jesus as forgiving Savior, do we under-

stand what it means to follow Him as Servant Lord in all that we think, say, and do?”

In all four Gospels, every time Jesus predicts His coming passion in Jerusalem, He refers to Himself as “the Son of Man.” The term is drawn from Daniel 7, especially 7:13; in the Gospels Jesus uses it as a reference to himself. The message of Daniel 7 is that although the Jewish people have suffered, the time is about to break in when they will be given domination and rule over the nations of the world forever. Jesus would embody this victory, but his “rulership” reverses expectations. His dominion is not one of tyranny (like the leaders of the world), but he calls His people to exercise a leadership wherein we devote our lives to serving each other and humanity at large forever.

(Note: In all four Gospels, Jesus uses the term “Son of Man” to refer to himself as the Messiah — 82 times in total; see Matthew 30, Mark 14, Luke 25, and John 13).

What Exactly is “the Gospel”

The Greek word gospel (*euangelion*) means “good news” or “good report.” The term is used only four times in Matthew, eight times in Mark, but not at all in Luke or John. In Matthew and Mark it always refers to the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom.

By comparison, Paul uses the word gospel 72 times in his writings. In Paul’s usage, the word gospel primarily refers to the message of salvation in Christ (specifically through his death and resurrection). Christianity has by and large focused on Paul’s understanding of the term.

Both of the above are correct ways to understand the word gospel. But each complements the other. Personal salvation in Christ is indeed good news, but God’s people need to also grapple with Jesus’ definition of the term as the in-breaking of new way of life, and its significance for their own faith walk.