

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Rock Turned To Stumbling Block

by Dan Trygg

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’¹⁸ I also say to you that you are Peter (a stone), and upon this rock (bedrock) I will build My called-out-people; and Hades’ gates will not be strong against them.’ ...²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.²¹ From that time Jesus began to show 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 up on the third day.²² Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’²³ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’” Matthew 16:15-23

“Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near;⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to Yahweh, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.⁸ ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares Yahweh.⁹ ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Isaiah 55:7-9

From the time Jesus secured a solid confession from Peter, the tenor and content of His teachings began to change. He began to prepare His core group of disciples for what lay ahead, *not only for Him but for them*, as well. He stated very plainly, and on repeated occasions, that *He would suffer* at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, that *He would be killed*, but on the third day *He would rise again*. Furthermore, *they, too, would suffer much, and must be willing to lay down everything* in life, even life itself, to be able to overcome all that the enemy has planned. To compromise is to endanger their very souls. To remain steadfast for Jesus may cost them their comfort, and even their lives. **To prepare them was necessary, because they would otherwise be crushed with shock, confusion and discouragement, once this backlash would strike them.**

Jesus was well aware of what was going to happen. These events did not take Him by surprise. He was introduced by John the Baptist as being the “Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). This was a word picture of a sacrificial or Passover lamb. In either scenario, *the death of the animal was required* in order to deal with sin. **The Lord had spoken of the fact that people hated Him, spoke ill of Him and persecuted Him, ...and that His disciples would be treated in the same way** (Matt. 5:8-10; 10:16-25; 12:31,32). Although He had already spoken of such things, it is clear that His disciples did not really believe that they would happen, at least not any time soon. **Jesus began to repeatedly return to the themes of persecution, death and the need for perseverance**, ...especially speaking of *His* suffering and death (cf. Matt. 17:12,22,23; 20:17-19,28; 21:33-46; 23:33,34; 24:9; 26:1,2,20-32).

As Jesus began to speak of this, Peter rebuked Him, saying that *this would never happen to Him*. **He spoke out of his human emotion and wishful thinking. In reality, however, Peter was dead wrong.** Jesus’ used very strong language in verse 21. He said that “*it is necessary* for Him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...” This was *not* negotiable. **Jesus did not present this as just a morose possibility that might happen. He knew that it was required in order that the purposes of God might be accomplished.** Peter, however, flush from the praise he had received from the Lord regarding the revelation he had received from the Father, stepped forward to take Jesus aside to correct Him. (How quickly we can turn from receiving our understanding from the Lord, to *assuming* that we know better than He!) Somewhere between verses 17 and verse 22, Peter had slipped from being tuned in to God to being tuned in to his *own* understanding and desires (cf. Prov. 3:5). This is a good warning to us. **How fickle and unreliable is the human mind and heart! God warns us that it is deceitful and unreliable** (Jer. 17:9; Ecc. 9:3). How quickly the spiritual receptivity was lost, and Peter decided to give the God-appointed King a piece of his mind. Pride had entered, and the *counselee* and *student* dared to become the *counselor* and *teacher* to the Son of God! **Peter had stopped listening to Jesus. Instead, he began asserting his own thoughts and emotions.**

In Peter’s defense, I think most of the translations paint too strong a picture of what he actually said. He did not say, “God forbid it, Lord!” This phrase is a translation of mainly one Greek word, derived from the word for “mercy” (e.g., Heb. 8:12). A literal rendering would be, “Mercy to you, Lord!”, but the strong implication was “May God have mercy on You!”, and the meaning was clarified by the next phrase, “Not never will this thing be to you!”

The first part, then, was an exclamation of Peter’s emotion, the natural response of a friend who does not want anything bad to happen to the one he cares for. (The friends of the apostle Paul did the same thing to him. When confronted with prophecies that depicted bonds and imprisonment for him, they were begging him not to proceed on his journey, even though the Holy Spirit had clearly commanded Paul to go. The warnings were genuine, and were meant to *prepare Paul* for what *he* would face. They were not, however, to direct him to avoid the trials that lay ahead, as his friends thought. – Acts 20:22-24; 21:4,8-14. *When hearing and interpreting prophetic words, we need to be wary of allowing our emotions to cloud our perception of what God’s*

purpose for the communication may be.) **That was natural, immediate, appropriate, even a cry from the heart to God. It was almost a prayer uttered to the Father.** (It was not, however, a Spirit-led prayer. It was more a blurt of the heart than a real entering into communion with God to *find out* and ask for what *He* wanted.) **Unfortunately, it was more of a declaration of Peter's own desires, couched in religious phraseology, than an actual prayer.** (Again, *we* need to be careful not to do the same. Prayer means that we are to be *asking God*, not *telling* Him how things are going to be.)

The second phrase, however, came from Peter's flesh. This was not merely an emotional reaction. There was deliberate choice involved here. **He came directly against the word of the Lord. He directly contradicted what Jesus had just told Him.** Furthermore, Peter was declaring something that he did *not* have the power to know, nor guarantee. He was way out of line. **He was making a declarative statement, ...as if he knew the future, or as though he could prevent the events that Jesus spoke of.** In either case, *he was saying things that were boastful, inflated, way beyond the limitations of the human condition.* James warns us of the danger of arrogantly boasting of things concerning which we have no control, especially boasting of the future (Jas. 4:13-16). He plainly says, "*All such boasting is evil.*" **Peter had an idea in his own head of what their future would be, ...and what Jesus was saying did not fit with Peter's agenda. He chose to not believe what Jesus was telling him, choosing instead a version of the future that originated in his own imagination.** (How often do we do *that*? For example, how often do we think we can escape consequences, even when God and others have told us of the dangers of risky behavior? We stubbornly, willfully choose to go on in our own way, ignoring wisdom and truth, believing the self-deception that somehow we will be immune from being caught? Remember what Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived, God is *not* mocked; whatever a person sows, this he or she will also reap"? We may *seem* to "get away with it" in the short term, but in reality the fruit of our choices just has not caught up with us, *yet*. There is *no* sin without consequences. Will we choose to believe *that*, or will we choose to believe the *lie* that somehow we are exempt?)

Jesus immediately recognized the source (or likeness) of this statement, and turned to face and deal with the suggestion. "Get behind Me, Satan!" "Satan" is Hebrew for "adversary". Whether Jesus was saying that Satan himself was actually operating in Peter is not clear. **Peter certainly was acting the part of an adversary, however.** At this moment, *just seconds after* his great spiritual declaration of who Jesus was, **Peter the foundation-stone had now become Peter the stumbling-block.** Instead of being aligned with Christ (the cornerstone) and His mission, thereby finding his proper place in the building of God's spiritual house (Eph. 2:19-22), and becoming an asset to the King and His Kingdom, **Peter was like a stone out of place, lying in the middle of Jesus' path to trip Him up.**

Note the subtlety of the temptation. Peter took Jesus aside, where He could change His mind *in private*, and not feel the pressure of having to save face before His men. **Peter's words first came in a natural human emotional response**, clothed in religious terminology. **This could serve to confuse what was the clear directive from God, ...and begin to turn the heart to wish for what God did not say.** *It was playing upon the natural desire for self-preservation* (lust of the flesh), and the *wish* that it would not *have to* turn out as God had said. Beginning to pray for something that *seems reasonable*, when God has *already* told you differently, either directly or through His word, is an easy way for the enemy to turn our focus away from God and His will. We begin to focus on and listen for *our desire*, hoping that God will bless and honor *that*. (Isn't this *exactly* what Christ would have to deal with again in the garden of Gethsemane? – Matt. 26:36-42.) **Then, the line of Peter's argument turned from emotional desire and questioning to a direct assault or contradiction of what God had said** (cf. Gen. 3:1-6). In this case, the lie was directed against the clear message from God that Jesus would have to suffer and die.

Jesus correctly identified the source of Peter's problem, "You are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men." God's ways are *not* our ways. His thoughts are *not* like ours. He often has an entirely different approach than ours. *Temptation and sin always appeal to inner longings and desires* (Jas. 1:14,15). *We either keep our perspective in tune with God, or we will wander off into error and eventually into sin.* **Jesus would not even begin to go there. Notice that He did not even attempt to reason with Peter.** He simply said, "Get out of My way. Your thinking is *not* from God, but from men." **He simply rejected the suggestion, and confirmed His commitment to continue in the Father's plan.** The apostle Paul used the word picture of a soldier leading away a captive at the point of a spear to describe how we are to deal with thoughts that are contradictory to God's truth, and would draw us away from obedience to His will (II Cor. 10:5). You don't get "friendly" with the enemy. You don't become familiar with him. You keep him on the correct end of your spear. You don't let him wander about, to come back again at another time. You **immediately address the wayward thought by calling it what it is** (a lie, a "stumbling block"), **and ordering it out of your mind.** "You are not from God. Devil, you're a liar! Get out of My way!"

It is clear that **to follow Jesus we must forsake our thoughts and perceptions of the world, and much of how we have learned to approach life.** *That is what repentance is, a change of perception.* If Peter could so quickly flip back into old thinking, we are also susceptible. **We must continue to seek God, to renew our minds with the washing of His word and Spirit, and be quick to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.** Jesus said if we continue in His word, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free.