

Don't Go Tell It on the Mountain

Matthew 16:13-28

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July 4, 2004

This past week I was in Virginia at our denomination's General Assembly. It was a rather sobering time. The keynote address was given by the pastor of the largest church in the denomination. He pointed out that only one-third of the churches in our denomination had reported growth that year. One-third were at a standstill, and one-third were shrinking.

As a whole, the church isn't really growing, so he challenged us to examine who we are, where we're going, and how we're going to get there. The denomination now has a vision statement that answers those questions.

It's all very much a part of the church growth movement that has been shaping the American church for the past forty years or so. Alarmed at decreasing church attendance and the rise of secularism, there's been a great deal written on how we can get the church to grow. For instance:

1. The church needs to be relevant, meeting the felt needs of a community.
2. The church needs to project the right image: spectacular, appealing, and entertaining. The church is a sign.
3. The church should be a powerful presence in society. (It's July 4th weekend and an election year. We can't help but notice the church seems to have lost its authority.)

So for the past forty years, the church has been analyzing herself, taking a hard look in the mirror, and struggling to get bigger and bigger and bigger.

In Matthew 28:19 at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." The nations don't know who the Christ is. They don't know who the Son of God is. But *you do!*

- Who is the Christ? [Crowd responds, "Jesus"]
- Who is the Messiah? [Crowd responds, "Jesus"]
- Who is the Son of the Living God? [Crowd responds, "Jesus"]
- Who gives you life and liberty? [Crowd responds, "Jesus"]

So [singing], "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born." I've got my "Jesus is my homeboy" shirt on! We should be selling bumper stickers, flags, tattoos, ornamental Jesus lawn figurines, and bobble head dolls! Because the world needs to see, and we are to be a sign! The world needs to know that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:13-28 is our text for the day. You'll remember Jesus has just talked about signs; earthly things and heavenly things; physical bread and spiritual bread.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to

them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah [“Christ” in Greek], the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed [happy] are you, Simon son of Jonah!”

This is the twelfth beatitude in the gospel of Matthew. I don't think it's an accident. Twelve is the number of the new Israel—the church. This is, like, the birth of the church!

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!” Now, that's strange, for in the other gospels, Peter's father is John not Jonah. But Jesus has just told them again about the “sign of Jonah.” Maybe Peter would be, like, a sign of Jonah or a son of the sign of Jonah.

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

The church has argued about this text for 2000 years. Whatever the case, the keys are at least the authority to pronounce the forgiveness of sins. And it's hard to imagine a greater authority or one more painful.

Well, Peter has blessing, revelation, and authority, and on him somehow Jesus will build His church: in Hebrew, His “synagogue”—His assembly—His kingdom—the messianic kingdom of the messianic age.

For hundreds of years, Israel had been occupied and oppressed. In Jesus’ day, the roads into Jerusalem would be lined with Roman crosses holding Jewish dissidents and criminals. For thousands of years, the prophets and their Scriptures had prophesied the coming of the Son of man—the Messiah—the King, who would liberate the children of Abraham, gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and restore the kingdom to Israel.

Peter just heard that he would be the Messiah’s right-hand man, prime minister, vice president . . . so get the campaign going!

T-shirts, camel stickers, a crusade, global conquest!
Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!

At this point, we expect the heavens to part and angels to sing, “Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere!” Next verse:

*Then [Jesus] sternly ordered the disciples
not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

Sternly ordered, commanded, warned: “Don’t you dare go tell.”

Matthew’s gospel contains the Great Commission, but we forget it also contains the Great Keep Your Mouth Shut. Already on several occasions Jesus has charged people to keep His identity and power a secret. And they’re all religious Jews. Yet He doesn’t say that to centurions and

Canaanite women. He even tells the Gadarene demoniac and Samaritan woman to go tell their neighbors about Him.

But to Peter and the disciples steeped in the tradition of Israel and seeing His miracle-working power for three years, He *strictly orders*, “Keep your mouth shut.”

Now, if Jesus would say that to them, we ought to wonder, Would He ever say it to us? And if so, why? Next verse:

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering

The Greek verb is paschō. It’s where we get our English word *passion*. In classical Greek, it basically meant “to be affected by something,” “to experience something,” or “to feel something.” By Jesus’ time, it primarily meant “to experience pain”—“to suffer.”

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! [Literally, “Mercy, favor, grace be yours, Lord!”] This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Jesus sure can burst a guy's bubble. Peter—Petros—Rock goes from being the blessed rock to a “scandalon”—a rock of stumbling. But worst of all, looking right at Peter, Jesus says, “Get behind me, Satan!”

Now, as the church we'd better pay attention, because this is the harshest rebuke Jesus gives His followers. So whatever Peter said is the height of scandal within the church of Jesus Christ. And if Satan could use Peter (the leader of Christ's church) to speak this scandal, could he not use us?

What was it that Peter said?

“Mercy is yours, favor is yours, grace is yours. You are blessed. You're the child of God. May this passion never happen to you.”

Does that sound familiar? How about:

“God is good, you're the children of the King, He blesses you, He gives you joy. His plan is for you to prosper. So surely He'd never let you suffer.”

It does sound vaguely familiar, kind of like:

1. “You're the Son of God. Why go hungry? Turn these stones into bread. You could feed yourself and the world.” That's *relevant*.
2. “If you're the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple. God will give angels charge over you and won't let you be hurt.” That would be *spectacular*.
3. “You're the Messiah. You came for a kingdom, a people, a nation. I'll give them all to you.” *Power*, without passion and pain.

It sounds familiar because it's the voice of Satan in the wilderness tempting Jesus.

And now Satan is tempting Jesus through Peter. But more than tempting Jesus, he's tempting His bride: Peter and the twelve, mother church, the woman. He's tempting Eve: "I can give you kingdoms. I can make you grow. I can make your group bigger. I can give you fruit . . . without passion or pain." Sound familiar? Satan is tempting Jesus and His bride to build His church without passion. Remember what Henri Nouwen wrote:

Jesus' first temptation was to be relevant: to turn stones into bread. Oh, how often I wished I could do that! . . . The second temptation to which Jesus was exposed was precisely the temptation to do something spectacular, something that could win him great applause. "Throw yourself from the parapet of the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms." But Jesus refused to be a stunt man. . . . You all know what the third temptation of Jesus was. It was the temptation of power. "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world in their splendor." . . .

What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people. . . .

Jesus lived that temptation in the most agonizing way from the desert to the cross. The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross

I wonder if we'd ever be tempted that way and if Jesus wants us to just shut up so we don't tempt others.

Well, Jesus says, "Peter, your mind [psyche] is stuck on human things not divine things." To Peter and the Jews, the Messiah was a worldly Messiah who would liberate them from the Romans and make their lives work in this world in the messianic kingdom.

The dominant view in American pop theology is that Jesus is still going to do that: He's going to return, kick some tail, reign on earth from Jerusalem, and fulfill all the prophecies about the Son of man that He missed the first time around. The problem is: Jesus told His disciples in Luke 18:31 that He was "going up to Jerusalem, and everything that was written about the Son of man in the prophets would be accomplished"—as if every foe was conquered at His cross—"finished"—and the messianic kingdom really was at hand. So now Jesus can't begin to reign in the future, for He already began to reign at His cross.

Matthew 28: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been [*has been*] given to me. Go therefore and make disciples"—more accurately, "Go disciple, for I'm in charge."

We Americans have such a hard time with the idea that Jesus reigns, because we still suffer. Many American Evangelicals argue God won't let us suffer—that's why we'll be raptured before the Great Tribulation. Raptured, but then we'll get to come back and reign with Christ 1000 years on earth in Israel, just like Peter thought he would.

Missionaries taught that doctrine to the church in China fifty years ago. During the cultural revolution, when thousands experienced great tribulation for Christ, those

believers expected to be raptured. When they weren't, they wondered if God was good and if God was love.

After the cultural revolution, those still alive asked those missionaries not to come back.

It's Fourth of July weekend, and we're worried about our country. Some quote a lot of Old Testament Scripture regarding Israel, like 2 Chronicles 7 where God says to Solomon in the temple:

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

It's a great verse and absolutely true, but we need to ask: What is our land? What is our country? What is the homeland we seek? What is the temple? What is the sacrifice? Who was Solomon, son of David, a picture of? And haven't we already been forgiven?

I hope God blesses America, but He has a different definition of blessing than we do. Peter found that out. Peter was blessed with the Messiah, but he didn't know what Messiah meant and what His authority entailed and how His kingdom comes. Peter was blessed:

Blessed are the poor.
Blessed are the mourning, the meek, the hungry
for righteousness.
Blessed are the merciful, pure in heart,
peacemakers.
Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness'
sake.

Blessed are the reviled and slandered. Of them
consists the kingdom.

Blessed is he “who is not offended at me”—that is
the sign of Jonah.

Blessed is Peter, son of Jonah. He will be blessed
with passion, crucifixion, and the entire
kingdom of heaven.

Well, I just get concerned we’re often looking for
the kind of Messiah Peter was looking for at first, in order
to guard what we call “blessings.” So we deny the real
Messiah and scandalize His name, taking it in vain. Exodus
20:7: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God
in vain.” That’s not a vocabulary list. It’s using God’s name
without meaning. Jesus is the Meaning.

Satan uses God’s name—the Messiah’s name—
without God’s meaning, which is Jesus Christ and Him
crucified—the passion.

Jesus reveals the Messiah must suffer many things,
and Peter argues, “God is love and blessing, so surely He
would never let His Son suffer pain.” Jesus hears the voice,
recognizes the voice, and flies into a rage . . . much like I
would if I walked into a room and overheard someone
speaking to my children:

You’re the children of Peter Hiatt. He loves
you so very much. So you can be sure he’d
never spank you or cause you pain. He’d
never make you go to the dentist or eat peas
or pull weeds in the back yard. And
whatever you want at the grocery store,
well, you just name it and claim it, because
all he has is yours. He loves you.

If I heard that, I'd fly into a rage, for those lies are deadly; believed, they'd destroy my children, ultimately convincing them that I don't love them but hate them. I'd grab that liar by the neck and yell, "You'd better believe I love them; you'd better believe all I have is theirs! My kingdom is theirs, but don't you ever utter my name in their presence again!"

Maybe that's why Jesus turned to His disciples and strictly charged them to tell no one that He was the Messiah, for no one yet understood what Messiah meant.

The Christ without the passion is not the Christ but the Anti-Christ, the imitation Christ, the Jesus of Islam and Buddhism and Hinduism and unrepentant Judaism and a good chunk of America and the thing we call the church.

Jesus without His death and resurrection is not Jesus the Christ. The Messiah without the passion is not the Messiah. And a church without the passion is a lie—the name of Christ taken in vain. Next verse:

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

Life is "psyche" in Greek, also translated as "soul," "self," "heart," or "mind." We're called to lose our minds. We're called to pick up a cross, and *that's psycho!* We're

called to share in Christ's passion. We're called to share in His sufferings and experience His pain.

How do we do that?

Well for one, Jesus told Peter that He was "going to Jerusalem to suffer many things." Perhaps the most painful of all was Peter's denial—the church's denial—Israel's denial. Peter denied Christ, for He wasn't the Messiah Peter expected. When the cock crowed, Peter saw what he had done, and he died. He lost himself, his mind, his view of reality, his psyche, his life, his relevancy, his spectacle, and his power. He lost his life and could only cling to Jesus his friend.

In Jerusalem, Jesus suffered many things including your sin and pain. When you come to His cross in repentance, surrendering your shame and believing His love, you share in His sufferings because they are *your* sufferings on Him.

Henri Nouwen wrote that we're tempted to relevancy, spectacle, and power, choosing power over love, and control over the cross, afraid of intimate passion. Then he writes:

One thing is clear to me: the temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.

Well, Peter had an intimate relationship with Jesus, and it hurt.

- Peter lost his mind but gained Christ's mind.
- Peter lost his life but gained Christ's life.
- Peter lost his relevancy, spectacle, and power but gained Christ.
- Peter lost his kingdom but gained God's kingdom—all of it.

And Jesus did build His empire—His church—on Peter. But *Jesus* built it, not Peter. It was Jesus in Peter.

We don't grow the church; Christ grows the church. "God makes things grow" (I Corinthians 3:7). What if all our striving for church growth is vain or worse than vain: a denial of the One who makes His church grow?

The church is a bride. There are two ways a bride can get big:

1. She can get more of herself, focus on herself, worry about herself; ashamed of herself or proud of herself but stuck on herself . . . always consuming more of herself.
2. She can get more of herself or more of *Himself*—her Groom's self. I mean, she can get pregnant: pregnant with His life—another life—all because she surrenders her shame and receives His body—His seed—His Word, trusting His love and sharing in His passion in intimacy. But she has to lose herself, forget herself, stop thinking about herself, lost in Him. Then she finds herself pregnant in Him.

She doesn't get pregnant by her own effort but by her own surrender. That's the metaphor. But you, bride of Christ, are the reality.

So we can get big with ourselves, focused on ourselves, or we can forget ourselves, focus on Him, and maybe get big with Him.

Recently a friend had a dream in which people kept trying to get her to go to the new shop across the street. It was a big, new building covered in signs—childish signs without much meaning. She finally went, following the crowd. They had new puppies and colorful clothes for sale, lots of children and families, and wholesome fun.

Then she went into the restroom, and women were everywhere losing babies—miscarrying babies. She was given instructions on how to do so and told not to worry. She wrote me saying, "I think it was a church, and the church was a business: big and growing, but aborting life."

When we focus on ourselves and getting big, I think we get big with ourselves and abort His life in us. His life comes by surrendering to His passion (ecstasy and pain). And bearing His life involves pain. (That's why we often abort.)

But when we bear His life—the fruit of His Spirit—His implanted Word, then we could not be more *relevant*. He is the bread of life. We could not be more *spectacular* to heaven, for we are grace and mercy, His body and blood harvested from this world of pain. We could not be more *powerful*, for the message of the cross is the power of God unto salvation. We hold the keys to the kingdom; we have authority through the blood—His blood.

So we share in His passion by surrendering our shame and receiving His love in intimacy. When we

receive His love, we become pregnant with His love and share His intimate passion for others.

Several years ago Doug Nichols, a missionary in India, contracted tuberculosis and was forced to stay in a government sanatorium for several months. Upon arrival, he began passing out tracts which taught: "Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the living God." He tried staff, patients, visitors: they all quietly refused the words.

About 2:00 AM one morning, he awoke while coughing and noticed an elderly man across the aisle. The man would sit up on the edge of the bed and try to stand, but then in weakness would fall back into bed. Nichols didn't know what he was trying to do, but the man finally fell back exhausted. Nichols heard him crying softly in the night.

In the morning he understood. The stench in the ward was awful. The man had been trying to get to the restroom. Other patients yelled insults. Angry nurses yanked him from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept. Nichols writes:

The next night I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering. I don't like bad smells, and I didn't want to become involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, his eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up.

He was very light due to old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom, which was just a filthy, small room with a hole

in the floor. I stood behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished, I picked him up and carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn't understand.

The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a tract.

As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout the day nurses, interns, and doctors asked for literature.

Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ already.

They put their trust in Christ, for the word had meaning.

For forty years in America, we've focused on church growth and advertising, "Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God." But maybe we've forgotten what it means. So maybe we should stop analyzing ourselves and the bride, and start worshipping the Bridegroom. Then when we say Jesus is the Christ, the words will have meaning. They'll be pregnant with life.

For forty years we've focused on church growth and haven't grown. It's interesting that during this same time, the believers in China have grown to be perhaps the largest Christian church in the world. Philip Yancey has a great article on it in the recent Christianity Today: from one million in 1950 to something like 80 million today.

And get this: In China there really is no Messiah without suffering. For to believe in the Messiah is to suffer. Advertising “Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the living God” is forbidden. Worldly relevance, spectacle, and power are usually illegal. All you can do is love God and love your neighbor (in weakness and pain). That is: You can make disciples. Next verse:

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly [I’m not lying] I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Well, either Jesus was wrong about His kingdom coming, or His kingdom *did* come and has been coming for 2000 years and we just missed it. For it wasn’t simply an earthly sort of kingdom with an earthly sort of power wielded by an earthly sort of Messiah.

We do know that at least one man standing there that day saw Jesus coming in His kingdom before He died. His name was John. He records what he saw in Revelation 19: a rider on a white horse with eyes a flame of fire, His robe dipped in blood. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The army of heaven followed in His wake. He is called the Word of God.

On Pentecost, having been to the cross, Peter preached that Word: “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”—the passion. And Peter preached with passion. The kingdom came, and 3000 were added to their number in one day.

Perhaps the King comes with His kingdom whenever we speak His name with passion. Perhaps He comes whether we see numbers or not. (He will not return void.) Perhaps He comes whether we see the angels or not. But He does come, and His kingdom is more real than all this world. So while the messiahs of this world turn to dust and pass away, the kingdom of our Lord marches forever on:

We look with earthly eyes and a human psyche, and all we see is a manger, a wretched man nailed naked to a cross, and a group of social rejects meeting in underground tunnels in Rome breaking bread and sharing some wine.

We look with human eyes, and all we see is one miserable tuberculosis patient helping another—helping a tired, old man go to the bathroom.

We see with earthly eyes, but in reality the King of Kings is coming in His kingdom with great power. The Word is conquering and claiming a kingdom. We can see it now with the eyes of faith, the eyes of enlightened hearts, and one day we'll see it with new eyes—true eyes, in a new world—real world.

The world looks, and all they see is thirteen social rejects having supper: irrelevant, unspectacular, and incredibly weak.

For on the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and having blessed it He broke it saying, “This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the

same way, after supper He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.” In Matthew it’s recorded He also said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Didn’t Jesus promise that He is here, wherever two or three are gathered in His name?

Didn’t Jesus promise that His kingdom is at hand?

Believe it in faith, and soon you’ll see it with true eyes. But don’t go tell it on the mountain until you’ve been to the mountain in faith where you’ve seen the Messiah crucified for you.

[Communion, Song: “We Want to See Jesus Lifted High”]

[Benediction:]

Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show by what death He was to die. But don’t feel bad, because from the very foundation of the world, *He* wanted you to see Jesus lifted up, that you might know what Messiah means.

In the book of Revelation, He’s lifted up too. He’s lifted up on His throne, and He’s a Lamb standing as if He’d been slaughtered.

I think lifted up in both places may in some incredible way be the very same place. And that’s our God. Do you see His glory, His beauty, His power, His wonder? One day you’ll see it with new eyes and a new body in an

eternal kingdom that's already here now by faith. In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel.

I went to Fuller Seminary, the center of the church growth movement. A lot of it is helpful: It helps us in planting and watering. But God brings the growth. That is, "We love because He first loved us."

Marguerite Ragain stood up at the Living Stones Service in May and said this:

While we were singing and praising the Lord, I saw a picture of Jesus sitting on His throne. We were in front of Him, smiling in great expectation. To the right and to the left of Christ were flowering fruit trees with beautiful buds, as they were in the petal stages. A wind came and blew. The petals flew off the trees showering us. We were so enthralled that we all, as one, started praising and worshipping the Lord. As we were praising, a golden powder came out of our mouths. The powder fell upon these trees. What we were doing—we were pollinating. Fruit started to grow; the fruit became so heavy that the boughs came down and hit the floor. As it hit the floor, sisters and brothers would be raised up. We grew and grew as a body larger and larger. . . . Before we bear fruit we pollinate with praise.

Well, you've been to the table and praised "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That is, you've been to the mountain and seen the Messiah crucified for you. Now "go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere." For

you're the bride. You are the Mother Church, and through you the Christ is born.

So God bless America. You are that blessing, salt and light, the poor, the meek, the mourning, the hungry and thirsting for righteousness, the blessed. In Jesus' name, go bless America. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Matthew 16:13-20

There are some that tell lies in such a way people think they are telling the truth. But far more dangerous are those that tell the truth in such a way that people think they are telling lies.

Kierkegaard

The established Church is far more dangerous to Christianity than any heresy or schism. We play at Christianity. We use all the orthodox Christian terminology – but everything, everything without character. Yes, we are simply not fit to shape a heresy or a schism. There is something frightful in the fact that the most dangerous thing of all, playing at Christianity, is never included in the list of heresies and schisms.

Kierkegaard

It happened that a fire broke out backstage in a theatre. The clown came out to inform the public. They thought it was just a jest and applauded. He repeated his warning, they shouted even louder. So I think the world will come to an end amid general applause from all the wits, who believe that it is a joke.

Kierkegaard

“I like your Christ but I don’t like your Christians. . . . They are so unlike your Christ.”

Gandhi

If the apostle were to return to earth today, I believe he would call the entire American Church to return to *the discipline of the secret*. This ancient practice of the apostolic church was implemented to protect the sacred name of Jesus Christ from mockery and the mysteries of the Christian faith from profanation. The ancient Church avoided mention of Baptism, Eucharist, and the death and resurrection of Christ in the presence of the unbaptized. Why? Because the most persuasive witness was the way one lived, not the words one spoke.

Brennan Manning, The Signature of Jesus

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

Exodus 20:7

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Matthew 16:21-23

And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will

give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

Matthew 4:3-10

Jesus' first temptation was to be relevant: to turn stones into bread. Oh, how often I wished I could do that! . . . The second temptation to which Jesus was exposed was precisely the temptation to do something spectacular, something that could win him great applause. "Throw yourself from the parapet of the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms." But Jesus refused to be a stunt man. . . . You all know what the third temptation of Jesus was. It was the temptation of power. "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world in their splendor."...

What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people. . . .

Jesus lived that temptation in the most agonizing way from the desert to the cross. The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby give us hope are the true saints.

One thing is clear to me: the temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.

Henri Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their

life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

Matthew 16:24-27

[Paul] looked upon his list of credits with contempt and made it clear that the only thing that really mattered was his relationship with Christ. “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3:7).

Paul based his authority on how much he had suffered for Christ. Seeking the role of the suffering servant rather than the role of power broker or office holder is the goal of the Christian.

Tony Campolo, The Power Delusion

Perhaps you have heard that you should *think* on the different experiences of Jesus Christ. But it is far better for you to bear, to carry, these experiences of Jesus Christ *within* yourself. This is the way it was in the life of Paul. He did not ponder the sufferings of Christ; he did not consider the marks of suffering on the Lord’s body. Instead, Paul bore in his own body the experiences of his Lord. He even said, “I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:17). Did he do so by considering such marks? No. Jesus Christ had personally imprinted Himself upon Paul.

Jeanne Guyon, Experiencing the Depths of Jesus

“For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Matthew 16:27-28

“Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But

of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

Matthew 24:30-36

And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Matthew 26:63b-64

And taking the twelve, he said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished.”

Luke 18:31

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:11-16

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