

BaptistWay Bible Series for February 8: Affirmation of the way of the cross

January 26, 2009

As I am writing this lesson, I also am preparing for Sunday School. I teach the 2- and 3-year-old Sunday School class at my church. One of the things I love about the children in my class is their eagerness to please me.

After we do our short Bible story, we usually make a craft for them to take home to remember the story. At the end of every craft we make, one little boy always asks, "Did I do good?" I always reply, "Yes, you did good." I almost always am pleased with his work and his willingness to participate, even when it is difficult (in the eyes of a 3-year-old).

This made me think about how we act toward the Father. Do we go to him, seeking his will in our lives, wanting to work for the kingdom and earnestly seek after his face, waiting to hear him say, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (17:5) or do we just sit back and wait for the Lord to act alone? Do we let life pass by without any type of desire to further his kingdom through our actions and our faith?

Beginning in Matthew 17:2, we see Jesus is transfigured. The urgency of the preceding call in Matthew 16:24-28 now is readily understood, with the revelation of Jesus' identity. In Matthew 16:24-28, Jesus alludes to his own tragic fate on the cross.

Crucifixion was viewed by Romans and Jews of Jesus' day as a terrible and shameful death. However, due to the work of Jesus, Christians have since come to see it as a way of sacrifice for an innocent sufferer or martyr. Jesus foreshadowed the latter understanding and used the cross and crucifixion

as an image of discipleship. One must die to himself (give up his own life) and take up his own cross (accept God's will) and follow Jesus (put his faith into action).

The scene continues in Matthew 17:5 when God's presence appears around Jesus and his declaration is known through past prophecies (Psalm 2:7, Deuteronomy 18:15-22). In verse six, upon hearing God's voice, the disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.

As depicted in the Old Testament, anytime the voice of the Lord arose, fear and trembling usually prevailed (Exodus 3 and Ezekiel 1). But Jesus tenderly touches the disciples and tells them not to be afraid (17:7).

The Father knew Jesus was about to endure the unthinkable; He was to suffer on the cross and die as the ultimate sacrifice for those who chose to believe. Jesus' message must be understood to focus on forgiveness of sins through his suffering on the cross.

Suffering is the true mark of Christianity. Everyday, as believers, we must endure hardships and suffering, picking up our cross daily and following Christ, no matter the cost. And we always should be following after God, seeking his declaration, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Today, many Christians sit back and wait for the Lord to do something without ever picking up their cross daily, denying themselves, and truly seeking after him. They wait on the Lord to prove his power through many signs and wonders, without ever acting on their faith. We are not to ask God to prove himself by any means; we are only asked to act out our faith by taking up our cross daily and following him.

Questions to explore

- *Suppose you found yourself somewhere that it was illegal to be a*

Christian. Would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would God be pleased with your efforts?

- Compare Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17 with his baptism in Matthew 3? What do these particular stories have in common? What is the symbolism of the Lord appearing at Jesus' baptism and during his transfiguration?
- After reading Matthew 16:24-28 and Matthew 17:1-9, in what circumstances do you find it most difficult to "take up your cross daily and follow him?"