

I Temptation.

Matthew 16: 21-28

Every normal human being shrinks from suffering and pain - especially where such suffering is not of one's own making or where there are ways open to avoid such suffering, and pain. Christ more than anybody else on earth was faced with such a choice - to follow a course which He knew His heavenly Father expected Him to take and thereby facing untold humiliation, rejection and suffering unto death. Who would not recoil from such a fate? Who would not be tempted to do everything possible to avoid having to pay such a terrible price? And even if that person was willing to pay the price ~~what~~ how does one react when well-meaning friends do everything in their power to prevent one from following what to them seems such a disastrous course?

What I have described here is ^{in fact} ~~exactly~~ what happened to Christ after He had reminded to his disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem, had to suffer severely at the hands of the rulers, and eventually ~~was~~ to be put to death. The immediate shocked response of Peter was: "God forbid it, Lord! That must never happen to you! What a terrible temptation for Jesus to heed ~~the~~ Peter's call, to give in to his plea! 'Find another way, a better way!' which other ways, ^{might} better ways could Xt. have found and followed?"

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1) The way of non-involvement: Christ could have continued feeding the hungry, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, even restoring the dead to life - in other words continued to "do good" - and no authority of church or state would have bathened to place any obstacle in his way. In fact, his popularity would have continued to grow and his image as man of God would have increased day by day. It was not his ministry of healing or service which was ~~caused~~ caused such angry reactions or was seen to constitute a threat to those who wanted to eliminate him - it was his claim to authority ^{divine} and authority, it was his challenge to the fake authority of the leaders, his attack on a religious and political system based on outdated traditions & wrong assumptions - these were the reasons why those in authority had to silence or eliminate him! What a terrible, fierce temptation must it have been to him to withdraw from further involvement in these areas of controversy or conflict and to desist any further pronouncements or actions which could jeopardise his future career, his safety or security!

2) The way of false compromise: Another form of temptation which surely must have occurred to Christ - and which may have been implied in Peter's plea - was to come to terms with his adversaries by way of concluding some or other deal based on a false compromise -

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a compromise which would have required a violation of important principles. E.g. Christ could have suggested a division of Palestine into two spheres of influence with Galilee and the northern provinces to be his operational base and Jews & Samaritans those of the opponents. Or he could have suggested: "Both of us detect ^{we know it to be} and reject the Roman rule - though ~~for~~ ~~different~~ ~~reasons~~." Let's therefore join forces for the time being until this hated regime has been overthrown - and then each of us can again go our own separate ways! Why fight when we can compromise?"

3) The way of open confrontation: Another way to avoid the otherwise inevitable and painful suffering would have been for Christ to deliberately create a situation of open conflict between Him and the powers that be of church and state. How early could He have done it! He had so much in his favour: He was an immensely popular national figure; He had masses of people behind Him; He could mobilise and exercise all His immense divine powers to build a strong political power base & to exploit the situation of dissatisfaction for his own benefit. He could have continued with his

Surely all such and other tempting ideas had occurred to Him before (right from the onset of his public ministry - as the temptation in the desert illustrated so examb!) - and would occur again as He set his face to move to Jerusalem! And his answer to all these tempting possibilities of finding other solutions?

Our answer: "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God but from man." It is the same answer which He gave at the onset to the Devil at the onset of his ministry when the Devil tempted Him by showing Him all the Kingdoms of this world and said: Worship me and all these Kingdoms are yours! I.e.: Accept not only my norms, my criteria but also my methods, my strategies - and you will have full control over all the Kingdoms of the world! What does the acceptance of these methods, these strategies signify? Nothing less than an open admission that God's intention to liberate mankind by way of the painful and self-sacrificing ^{course} of the cross is in fact a fake, a farce, a failure!

Christ's answer is a clear definite NO! A total rejection of the solution offered by Peter - and all those siding with Peter.

Not only that - but immediately after rejecting Peter's stand, Christ proceeds to set out His demands of discipleship: Forget self, carry the cross, follow Him - to lose his life for Christ's sake. We must never forget that Christ is actively busy in asserting his kingship and in establishing his Kingdom here and now. And in rejecting the solution offered by Peter He in fact is telling all those who wish to follow Him:

- (1) That discipleship of Christ demands active involvement in the struggle for justice. It is not enough to busy oneself with doing good to the hungry, the sick, the maimed - discipleship also demands an active involvement in exposing injustice, in opposing any ^{action of} system based on falsehood, duplicity and deceit!
- (2) That discipleship of Christ demands the rejection of any compromise which requires a violation of the basic principles of love, truth and justice!
- (3) That discipleship of Christ must of necessity create ~~conflict~~ ^{and} confrontation which could lead to conflict but if undertaken by the Christian it must be in obedience to God's demands for his Kingdom and not because of ^{personal} political ~~motivation~~ ^{interests}. If it is the latter, it ~~or~~ bypasses (circumvents) the cross and does not serve the highest interests of the Kingdom of God!

Suffering

Luke 21: 8-19

9 forms of suffering identified

1. Suffering through false religious claims

"Many shall ..."

2. Suffering through conflicts in human society:

"Wars & insurrections ..."

3. Suffering through calamities in Nature:

Earthquakes, ~~famines~~ & ~~plagues~~

4. Suffering through sickness & infirmity:

Plagues (pestilences) in many places

5. Suffering through economic distress:

"Famines"

6. Suffering through persecution: "Persecute you"

7. Suffering from religious & secular authority:

8. Suffering through your family

Your parents, brothers, your relations
& your friends will bet

9. Suffering through association with

Christ "All will hate you for your
allegiance to me"

- Someone

18th - ~~For~~ Suffering

- 1) Is. 59: 12-20
- 1 Pet. 2: 19-25
- Matt. 16: 13-28

- 2) Jerem. 2: 1-13
- Mark 14: 53-72

25th = Am. Exod. 34: 29-35
Transfiguration 2 Cor 3: 12-18

Am. Matt 17: 1-8
Isaiah 52: 13-53
Mark 15: 1-20

1st: Am. Isaiah 63: 1-9

Victory of the Cal. 2: 8-15
Cross. John 12: 20-32

Am. Is. 53: 7-12
Mark 15: 21-41