

The Third Prediction of the Passion

(Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34)

31 Then Jesus took the Twelve aside and said to them, “Look, **we are going up to Jerusalem**, and **everything the prophets have written** about the Son of Man will be **fulfilled**. 32 He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will flog him and **kill** him, and on the third day he will **rise again**.”

34 But the disciples **did not understand** any of these things. The meaning was **hidden** from them, and they did not **comprehend** what he was saying.

This is the third time Jesus has told his disciples what will happen to him when they reach Jerusalem. The first time is recorded in Luke 9:21, the second in 9:44. And in 9:51, Luke notes that Jesus was resolute about going to Jerusalem for the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover). The venerable King James Version renders it so well: “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.”

Mark’s account tells us that “The disciples were amazed, but those who followed were afraid.” Even though Jesus has only told the Twelve about his fate, surely everyone had enjoyed watching Jesus make public fools of the religious leaders – and had heard the swirling rumors about their plots against him. Who would not have been wondering what might happen to them if they were standing too close to Jesus when the Temple soldiers came for him? Who among the Twelve would not have been amazed that Jesus was walking straight into the inevitable confrontation?

vv.31-33

If everyone else harbored misgivings, Jesus was determined. He knew what the Prophets had foretold about Messiah’s fate. He was aware of the gruesome details about Roman torture. Surely his heart melted like wax at the thought of being forsaken by the Father on the cross. (Psalm 22) But he had studied the Scripture enough to also know that his suffering would bring peace and healing to God’s people and that, after his anguish, he would see the light of life. (Isaiah 53) He clung to the promise of Psalm 16:10 — “For you will not abandon my soul to

Sheol, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” He would be obedient, even unto death, but he nevertheless would pray, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done.” (22:42)

v.34

Neither Matthew nor Mark include this note in their accounts. Jesus’ two previous warnings about his impending crucifixion had not been as detailed as this one. Yet in spite of the graphic details the Lord provided this time, the Twelve still did not understand what he was talking about. In fact, they still were clueless and confused until the resurrected Lord appeared among them, showed them his pierced hands and feet, and ate a piece of fish. They would not understand until he opened their minds. (Luke 24:45)

Yet here Jesus had spoken to them in a painfully plain manner. How could they not understand?

The verse says the meaning was “hidden” from them. What is hidden must have a hider. The Almighty often told his prophets to deliver a message similar to the one he gave Isaiah: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.” (Isaiah 6:9) Jesus often ended a teaching with “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (eg Luke 14:35).

Perhaps there was a kindness in God’s hiding Jesus’ meaning from the Twelve. What lay ahead of their little band might have prematurely scattered them, just as they would abandon Jesus upon his arrest.

Or perhaps, as W. Clarkson preached, the Twelve did not understand “because the truth conveyed was so exceedingly unwelcome. It cut across all their cherished hopes respecting the Messiah; it dashed their natural expectations to the ground; and it went sorely against all that their affection prompted them to believe and cherish. ‘It could not, must not, did not mean that,’ they said in their hearts.”

The idea of Messiah as a suffering servant ran completely counter to everyone’s notion of a king who would deliver the Jews from their oppressors.

John Piper notes that the Twelve's defective understanding of Jesus also flawed their understanding of discipleship – a faulty view we must see so we don't make the same mistake.

Piper preached: "Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is our journey, and if he set his face to go there and die, we must set our face to die with him. Luke 9:23-24 reads: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.'¹

R.M. Edgar points out that people all too often read the Bible in a one-sided way.

He preached: "What was about to happen to Jesus was prophesied ages before. The Old Testament presented a suffering as well as an exalted Messiah. But the Jews totally overlooked the humiliating aspect. And in the very same way people go still to God's Word, and find there only what they want to find. It needs great trials oftentimes to expound some passages of the Divine Word to us. We are partial students; we do not enter into the wide meaning of the Word as God would have us!"

In other words, the truth is hidden from people who insist on continuing to believe what they already believe.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-set-his-face-to-go-to-jerusalem>