

“Lord God, you have appointed me as Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 16

²¹From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again.

²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you.”

²³But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?”



First we had “helicopter parents, the type who hover over their children’s every move. Now we have “lawn-mower” parents (a.k.a., ‘bull-dozer’ or ‘snow-plow’ parents). They doze away obstacles. A mother rushes to bring a boy’s violin to school when he forgets it instead of letting him deal with the consequences. A dad yells at the principal if his daughter gets in a fight. Lying about a child’s homework.

What about “lawn-mower” disciples? Those followers and friends of Jesus would push anything out of the way so that the Messiah’s grand kingdom could be realized.

Do Christians treat Jesus with kid-gloves? Do we click into full-on protective mode when Jesus' reputation is on the line?

Without a doubt, Jesus was sent to show us how to be nice. But this was not the primary mission. Jesus was sent to die. It will be difficult to hide that fact or protect Jesus from it. However, the disciples couldn't understand and couldn't help but put together ...

The Plot To Protect Jesus

1. To be Christ is not safe

Why in verse 20 weren't the Twelve Apostles allowed to preach Jesus as Christ? First, while Peter's confession was glorious and beautiful, they still didn't know what they were talking about. Second, Jesus was about to share Himself crucified for the first time. This was new information, information that Jesus would share repeatedly throughout the gospels. It was the first time Jesus talked about going to the cross, and His followers and friends hated it.

They were repulsed by it. It was grotesque and it horrified them. It was so bad that Simon Peter took Jesus aside and scolded Him for the suggestion.

From then on, a half-baked plot began formulating in the minds of Peter and the apostles, that maybe Jesus would need their protection. Peter would deny that he would deny Jesus. He would bring a couple swords to the garden of Gethsemane, where he was a sorry excuse for a sentry, unable to stay awake while Jesus prayed. This would all culminate in lopping off the ear of a high priest's relative, whom Jesus consecutively healed. What a silly idea—to protect the Savior of all the world. These are *“the things of men,”* not of God.

It would seem that Jesus had nothing but a rude rejoinder for Peter, turning His back and calling Peter by the name of the Enemy, *“Satan.”* What is bad about Peter responding this way? He had Jesus' best interests in mind. He wanted Jesus to be safe. He wanted to show Jesus his love. He stuck by this Teacher every time. *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life.”* *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* One reason Peter's response was bad is directly contradicting Jesus. Second, anything in the way of God's plan to save us was a stumbling block to Jesus. It was another temptation of Satan, who could influence even the confusion of the Twelve against Jesus.

Jesus Christ had not come to be safe, protected, kept at arm's length from any trouble or difficulty. He was part of a dangerous plan that would mean His death. Imagine how astonishing this would sound.

Do you ever believe you can or should protect Jesus Christ? I admit that sometimes I attempt to protect Him with rationale and logic. I attempt to reason Him to people rather than let Him speak. Sometimes we feel we need to defend Him more than we need to befriend His enemies, influence them, and love them.

Transition: Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wondered what Martin Luther would say to him if the great reformer came back from the dead. Kierkegaard wrote that Luther would interrogate him, saying, "Faith is a perturbing thing. To what effect has faith ... perturbed you? Where have you witnessed for the truth, and where against the untruth? What sacrifices have you made, what persecutions have you endured for Christianity? And at home in the family life, how has your self-sacrifice and abnegation been observable?"

2. To be Christian is not safe

Jesus, the Son of the Living God, the Christ, took it a step further. He added that the Twelve apostles would also have a cross. They would need to deny themselves and be ready for suffering.

Christianity is not safe. It is not full of earthly blessings. Thus Christianity isn't always a great business plan. It is not success-driven. Christianity isn't nice and polite at every turn. Being nice and polite doesn't guarantee salvation. It doesn't even indicate saving faith. Suffering for the faith indicates faith. Christianity is juxtaposed with our own sinful nature. To deny ourselves means to mortify (or to kill) the sinful self within us, warring against our new self.

Often we want a government that will protect Christianity. Half of this country seems to think that the Republicans know how to protect Christianity. The other half seems to think that the Democrats will protect Christianity. The trouble is that a party cannot fully insulate the Christian faith. Christianity doesn't need protecting, because true Christianity won't accept protection. Christian faith rejoices if it must bleed like Jesus. Christian faith rejoices if it is shamed and insulted like Jesus. Christian faith numbers itself among good company if it is pinned to death, if that is what it takes to take on the image of Jesus.

Paul says, “*I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead*” (Php 3:10).

Christianity is dangerous, as dangerous as following Jesus to the cross. Some of us might get persecuted. Some of us might feel the heat of earthly governments prepared to strip us of our freedoms. This is no big news. It’s been happening to Christians for a very long time.

How do you protect your faith; i.e., try to keep your faith safe?

- Are there things that are Christian you would do, but you don’t do because they involve uncomfortable risks?
- Are there friends at school you would make, but it’s not popular, so you wouldn’t try?
- Are there times when you would pray, but it would be awkward, so you dare not be quite that Christian?
- Are there enemies that you probably could befriend, but that’s so countercultural that Jesus couldn’t possibly expect it from you?
- Are there moments in your day when your children are asking about Jesus, but you swept faith under the rug?
- Are there decisions that you would make, but it doesn’t seem to benefit yourSELF, so you decide for what feels good?

Do not be deceived. Faith doesn’t need your protection. It’s our souls that Jesus wishes to protect, and He does it by sending the Spirit to work faith in our hearts.

Jesus forces us to think about these matters. He forces our faith by issuing a heroic saying, stated as a question, “*What good is it to gain the whole world but forfeit your soul?*” Too many have set aside the cross in order to protect their way of living, to safeguard their earthly ease and welfare. They have, however, lost their souls. Nothing in all the world is as precious as the soul, and so nothing whatsoever in this world can be given in exchange. If the soul is lost, no price is enough to redeem or deliver that soul.

The only man whose soul was forfeit and yet gained the whole world was Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Thank the Lord that the plot to protect Jesus failed miserably, for in that misery of the cross was a world of souls won. Amen.