

Commentary on Matthew 16:21-28

by Dr. Knox Chamblin

II. THE WORK OF JESUS THE SON OF MAN. 16:21-28.

Having considered the person of Jesus, we now inquire into the passage's teaching about his work.

A. Jesus the Suffering Son of Man. 16:21-25.

"**From that time on** Jesus **began to explain** to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and **suffer many things** at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must **be killed...**" (16:21).

1. The time of the disclosure. Here for the first time in Mt, Jesus expressly foretells his passion. One reason for his choosing to make this disclosure at this particular time, and to his disciples exclusively, has already been considered (cf. the above comments on 16:13-20 as a "turning point"). Another reason is that Peter has just confessed him to be the **Christ**, or **Messiah** (v. 16). In face of this confession, the disclosure of v. 21 discourages the disciples from entertaining and propagating false concepts of Messiahship. For the same reason Jesus, having just pronounced Peter "blessed" for his confession (v. 17), proceeds immediately to warn his disciples "not to tell anyone" that he is the Christ (v. 20). Just how urgently the disciples needed both the warning and the disclosure, may be judged from Peter's response in v. 22 ("Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you"), and from Jesus' counter-response in v. 23 ("Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men"). Having just **received** revelation from God the Father, Peter now (however unwittingly) **rejects** revelation from God the Son, heeds instead the voice of Satan, and consequently confronts Jesus with the same temptation he had faced in the wilderness.

2. Jesus' interpretation of Messiahship. Messiahship according to Jesus entails suffering - a concept which (as Peter's response shows) was not readily acceptable even - or especially - to Jews affirming the reality of his Messiahship (according to Gundry, 338, "Almost certainly the Jews of Jesus' day did not think that the Messiah would suffer"). This is the kind of Messianic ministry for which Jesus was commissioned at his baptism (see comments on 3:13-17). And not only must Messiah suffer: all who would follow him must willingly take the same path (vv. 24-25).

3. The fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus prophesies that he must suffer (**dei**, "it is necessary," stands over all four of the following infinitives, "to go ... to suffer ... to be killed and ... be raised," v. 21b). These events must occur, both because the Father has ordained them (again 3:15, 17) and also because the Scripture has foretold them (NB Lk 24:25-27, including the **edei** of v. 26). It is the **Son of Man's** suffering that Jesus foretells (cf. Mt 16:13; the parallel to 16:21 in Mk 8:31 reads "that the Son of Man must suffer..."). Moreover, according to Mk 9:12 "it is written [i.e. Scripture has prophesied] that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected." It is true that Dan 7 does not expressly speak of the suffering of the Son of Man. Yet we recognize Jesus as the One with both unequalled wisdom to **understand** the OT and unique authority to **interpret** it (cf. R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament, 223-26, on "the originality and influence of Jesus" as interpreter of the Bible). In this capacity, Jesus identified the Son of Man of Daniel 7 with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. See Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, 91-97, especially 94; F. F. Bruce, The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes, 96-99 (he thinks Jesus "was probably reproducing the originally intended identification of the Son of Man with the Servant," p. 98).

4. The gathering storm. Those at whose hands Jesus is to suffer, are identified as "the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law" (v. 21). The real opposition is Jewish; no direct reference is made to the Romans who serve the Jews' purpose. Here for the first time Matthew mentions "the elders" as potential enemies of Jesus (the only prior reference to **hoi presbyteroi** came in 15:2, "the tradition of the elders"). While this is the first reference to the "chief priests" in the context of Jesus' ministry (the one earlier usage of **archiereus** comes in 2:4), we know that priestly opponents acted in concert with the Sadducees. And based on what Matthew has already written about the "teachers of the law," we are not in the least surprised to find them numbered among those who will compass Jesus' death (cf. 9:3; 12:38; 15:1, and comments on those passages). Thus in the end the very ones who repudiate Jesus' claim to Messiahship and consequently seek to destroy him, will unwittingly serve God's saving purpose; for the cross to which Jesus' enemies send him is the place for the atoning sacrifice that God the Father has appointed for him and that Messiah has freely chosen for himself (20:28; 26:28).

B. Jesus the Glorious Son of Man. 16:21-28.

1. His resurrection, v. 21. The Father will vindicate the suffering Son of Man by raising him from the dead. Those who suffer with him shall likewise surely be vindicated (v. 25b).

2. His return, v. 27a. That earlier exaltation is completed in this glorious event. As in Dan 7:13-14, the Son of Man is depicted as a divine being entitled to the worship of heaven (the angels are his, not just his Father's; the two **autous** of v. 27 are parallel).

3. His judgment, v. 27b. The immediate purpose of his advent, according to this passage, is to "reward each person for what he has done" (cf. Jn 5:27). In this context, "what one has done" must include his fundamental response to the claims of Jesus the Messiah (cf. 16:24-26, linked with v. 27 by the opening **gar**, "for," of v. 27a).

4. The meaning of v. 28. Here (I believe) "coming" means not the Parousia itself (so Gundry, 341), but anticipations of it in various events which occur by virtue of Jesus' resurrection (v. 21) and as manifestations of his resurrection power - notably the coming of the Spirit, the Gentile mission, and the judgment upon the Jewish nation in 70 A.D. (see Carson, 380-82). This excludes the Transfiguration; v. 28 seems a strange way to refer to an event only six days away; and the event on the Mountain is hardly an anticipatory "**coming**" of Jesus.