

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Matthew 16:13-28

By Raymond White

The twelve disciples were expecting an earthly kingdom. That's what they were expecting because that's what Jesus was preaching, or seemed to be anyway.

Matthew 3:2 the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 6:10 thy kingdom come...on earth...

Matthew 12:28 the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Luke 10:9 say...the Kingdom of God is come nigh...

That sure sounds like the Lord had "now" in mind, and that energized them.

But then, at a moment, the message changed. That moment occurred when Jesus had taken his disciples to Caesarea Philippi. It appears that he took them there on kind of a sabbatical leave, a respite, to get away from the crowd just so he could ask them this question.

Matthew 16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? :14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias, and other, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. :15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? :16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

There were not visiting Caesarea Philippi, they were visiting "the coasts" of Caesarea Philippi, that is, the outskirts, the suburbs. In other words, they avoided the metropolis. Why would they do that? Because Caesarea Philippi was a party town. It was where people went to have fun, like Las Vegas today. And Jesus was not there to have fun. Although he was a mingler, he would never have gone to their casinos and strip bars. He was there for a meeting, a very important meeting, a convention of sorts, and so "the coasts" was as far as they got.

The keynote of that meeting was this question: "Tell me about your travels and everyone you've been talking to. Who do they all think that I am? What is Israel's conclusion about me?"

Here was their collective answer: Jesus is this prophet or that prophet or anyone other than who he really was. Israel had seen and heard everything and came to the wrong conclusion. Israel had missed their messiah. That was bad news for Jesus because it meant a change in plans.

Now, to be sure, Peter did have the right answer, but Peter alone wasn't sufficient. The problem was major: the kingdom could not come because Israel would not receive her king. Jesus now had to switch to Plan B. (Well, in God's long range plan in heaven, it was Plan A all along, God just took a circuitous route getting there. But from Jesus' mortal perspective, it was indeed Plan B.) At that moment, Jesus changed everything. He did three unexpected things:

1. Jesus Handed the Kingdom Over to Peter

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. :19 And I will give unto thee

the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven

2. Jesus Announced That He Must Die

Matthew 16:20 *He charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. [Why bother. It's too late. When switching to Plan B] :21 from that time forward began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed the third day.*

3. Jesus Told Them That the Kingdom Was Delayed Until He Returned

Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. :28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

This was certainly a different message than what they had been accustomed to hearing, and they didn't like it, this Plan B. For them, everything was going exactly wrong. If Jesus died, there was no kingdom.

How did they react to all this really bad news? Their reactions were mixed.

[1] PETER

Peter objected immediately and strongly.

Matthew 16:22 *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*

Peter's rebuke was so strong that Jesus rebuked him back. Even so, Peter did not change his mind. He was determined that this was not going to happen. And at Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was Peter who raised his sword and cut off an ear of one of the soldiers. Give him credit for determination anyway.

[2] JAMES AND JOHN

James and John had an opinion that was different from the others. Whatever happens, happens, but we'd better make our power play now and get the two most favored positions, sitting right next to the king.

Matthew 20:20 *Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons...:21 ...she saith unto him, grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left in thy kingdom. :24 And when the ten heard it they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

[3] JUDAS

Judas had even a different opinion. It's all a bust, he thought. The kingdom isn't coming, indeed there is no kingdom, and I've squandered three years of my life for nothing. Time for damage control. I'd better grab what I can and get out of this mess.

Matthew 26:14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, :15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

For Judas, it was about severance pay.

[4] THOMAS

But then there was Thomas. Thomas, like Judas, also thought it was a bust, that there was no kingdom and nothing good was going to come from all their hard work. But unlike Judas, Thomas determined to stay with Jesus and die with him if it came to that.

John 11:16 Let us also go that we may die with him.

These were two different men, Thomas and Judas. When things got ugly, one was ready to die with Jesus, the other was ready to grab what he could and get out.

[5] CONCLUSION

It's easy to stand with the winning team — everyone likes trophies, and ribbons, and accolades — but when things go wrong, where do we stand then? God is not just looking for people who will win with him, he is looking for people who will lose with him, the man for all seasons, the Thomas person.

Oh, God promises a victory at the end, but that's a matter of faith. To get there, we have to get past the realities of now. Courage and loyalty: these are the things that forge kingdoms.