

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 2026

Text: Matthew 16:21-28 (Gospel)

Other Texts: Jeremiah 15:15-21 (Old Testament); Romans 12:9-21 (Epistle)

“Setting our Mind on the Things of God Rather Than the Things of Man”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The text for our meditation is the Gospel and there are two distinct things that I want to address this morning. The first is Jesus’ statement to His disciples:

“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”¹

I want to quickly bring this up because this text is difficult as it might seem to mean that some of those who were standing there with Jesus would still be alive when He returns on the Last Day, which clearly is not the case. Due to this some have determined that this is an error which proves the Bible is not reliable. Of course this is not the case. But to what then is Jesus referring? With the understanding that the word “kingdom” is also rightly rendered “reign,” there are likely three events that the Lord has in mind.

First, not many days later, Peter, James and John would see Jesus shining in His divine radiance on the mount of Transfiguration. Second, St. Mark informs us that Jesus invited the crowd to come to Him when He spoke these words, but only some of them, eleven of the apostles (not Judas Iscariot) and maybe some of the others would see Jesus after He rose from the dead and, again, ascended into heaven. Finally, on the judgment side, only some of them would be alive when the King of kings unleashes His wrath and just judgment upon Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews who rejected Him using the Romans in 70 AD. All of these are prophetic, that is, they both represent and anticipate Christ’s glorious return as Judge and King.

With that question answered and Scripture, once again, vindicated (as if it needs to be!), let us turn to the second topic for this morning: Jesus’ words of warning and rebuke, “For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”² These words were originally addressed to Peter who received the full harshness of Jesus’ condemnation, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me.”³ The same Peter who, as we heard last week, *was just called blessed* because He confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. With this context in mind, we can learn a lot from this text for our Christian faith and life.

To begin, we note how clear it is that there are both things of God and things of man and, as these two are completely opposed to each other, our mind cannot be on both. Consequently, we

¹ Matthew 16:28. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² Matthew 16:23.

³ Ibid.

are both called to diligently put our minds on the things of God even as we are warned by Peter's example how quickly and easily we can fall into putting them on the things of men. How quickly and easily we too can go from being called blessed to being rebuked, from pleasing God to needing to repent of grievous sin. But what then are the things of God and the things of man?

It is obvious that the things of man are not simply aspects of this earthly life, eating, drinking, carrying out our vocations, not even rest and relaxation. After all, these are *blessings*, daily bread from God's hand. More, Jesus Himself did these very things so they cannot be sinful *in and of themselves*. No, the things of man, being put in opposition to the things of God, refer that which is of the corrupted world of unbelieving humanity and the corrupted wicked sinful nature of each individual person. But this goes deeper still. For with His rebuke of Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus not only shows the depth of the fallen condition of the world of mankind and individual people, but worse, their complete enslavement to Satan who is the ruler of this evil world.⁴ No wonder we must put our mind on the things of God and not the things of man, for the things of man are equated with Satan; *they are of the devil!*

The Bible is clear on what are things of man. The Lord Christ says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."⁵ St. Paul writes to the Galatians,

[T]he works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.⁶

But the things of man go beyond obvious sins. For it is the way of sinful mankind to corrupt blessings, using good things for evil, or simply making the good things are priority, making the gifts more important than the One who has given them. And so family, friends, work, recreation, health of body and mind, all of these the devil would seek to corrupt, either by are abusing them or by our making them into an idol. Make them into an idol even as the person pretends they are simply honoring them rightly. I say pretends, because they should know better if they are in the Word, but by their failure to be in it and to heed it when they hear it, they fail to repent of this idolatry and so are fully accountable for it before God.

Today's text warns us of something else concerning the world as well. For even as Peter, a close follower and friend of Jesus, not only fell into temptation but also became a source of temptation for Jesus, so it is that those who are close to us may well be the greatest means of temptation unto us. We know something is a terrible sin, until a loved one is doing it. Suddenly it's not so bad. Suddenly it's all "judge not lest ye be judged!" to any and all who call it sinful and wrong, who say such requires repentance. "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'"⁷ The Holy Spirit gives us this warning, and it might well be warning us about one of our closest loved ones. Do we put our mind on the things of God, the Holy Spirit's warning, or the things of

⁴ John 12:31; Cf. 1 John 5:19; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4.

⁵ Matthew 15:19-20a.

⁶ Galatians 5:19-21.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:33.

man, our family member or friend who is becoming our idol? On the flip-side, are we a source of temptation unto others in any way? God keep us from that!

A final aspect of the things of man is its view on God. The man should accept a god, a creator, as anything else is irrational (which then shows how irrational the sinful mind of many truly is!). But the things of man truly fall short of understanding how God should work. Consider Peter, who rightly confessed Jesus as the Christ of God and the Son of God, then turns around and *rebukes* Jesus (the Messiah, God!) for speaking of needing to suffer and die. And so it is that the things of man would see suffering as below God and, therefore, below His people.

This is because the sinful mind does not even begin to comprehend the depths sin, that in others, but especially its own. It doesn't realize (or refuses to accept!) that its own sins deserve nothing less than punishment, death, and hell from a truly holy God. It doesn't realize (or refuses to accept!) that only by God becoming a true man and taking our place, living in perfect obedience to God's will and dying for our rebellion on the cursed cross, only by that act of grace could sinners be saved for God remains just by punishing sin even as He is merciful to sinners. And the mind set on the things of man can only see suffering as bad, something a follower of God should not have to experience. No doubt this was a part Peter's rebuke of Jesus. Sure, he loved Jesus and didn't want Him to suffer. But he also perceived that if Jesus was to suffer and die, then those who follow him might well experience the same. "Pick up your cross and follow me" simply does not compute with the mind set on the things of man!

So yes, the things of man are many and varied. But what then are the things of God? Again, the Scripture doesn't leave us wondering! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁸ "[The Spirit] will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."⁹ "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."¹⁰ "This is the will of God, your sanctification."¹¹ What an amazing thing that the things of God begin with His incredible love for us sinners and His desire to save us. A desire put into place by His Son living, suffering, and dying to pay for our sins, that we would be saved. The things of God don't just make salvation a possibility, but He then actually calls us to faith in Jesus, our Redeemer, by His Word and Spirit. And this faith is as living and active as the Word by which He creates it, because His Spirit which is active in His Word becomes active in believers, raising us to a spiritual life of holiness.

Paul describes the mind set on the things of God: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."¹² It is the mind that no longer conforms to the ways of the world, but is transformed, delighting in the holy commandments of God.¹³ And so it is the mind that takes up our cross, losing our life to live as a disciple of Jesus, perhaps in the strict sense, but also in the sense of giving up the "joys" of the things of man. It is suffering for His sake, internally against the sinful nature, externally against the world, always against the devil. It is doing so in loving obedience, but also trusting that "we

⁸ John 3:16.

⁹ John 16:8.

¹⁰ John 6:29.

¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

¹² Galatians 5:22-23.

¹³ Cf. Romans 7:22; 12:2.

rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.”¹⁴ Truly, the cross is a primary means of increasing our conformity to Jesus, for He is Christ *crucified*.

St. James, as is his usual way, is rather blunt, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”¹⁵ Works of true love for God and others *and* keeping away from sin. Not either or, but both and. A true love that bears the cross, confident that by it God is working good in us. A good that, on the Last Day when the Christ Jesus returns in glory as the Judge, will have its hope fulfilled when we our bodies rise to live with the risen Lord in eternal glory.

May God exorcise the things of man from our minds, and so put them on His things. Amen!

¹⁴ Romans 5:3-5.

¹⁵ James 1:27.