

The Daily Cross – Luke 9:23-26, Mark 8:34-38

Introduction – “Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demand as well as an offer. Indeed, the demand was as total as the offer was free” – John Stott. So which is it? Is Christianity easy or hard? To follow Christ promises salvation and blessings beyond our imaginations. To follow Christ also means to lose everything for His sake. Jesus explains how these are both true and whether it is a new day or a new year, how the path of the cross is the path for the Christian – always.

If Anyone Desires to Come After Me... - Jesus lays down the requirements for those who would like to follow Him, to be His disciple, to be a Christian. The context tells us where Jesus is going, the place by which His followers would “*come after...*” Peter had publicly and for the first time declared that Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 9:20). He was the anointed King who was coming to deliver His people whom the prophets foretold. But as soon as this declaration is made, Jesus made clear that He would suffer and be killed and would rise on the third day (v21). Mark alone records that Peter at this point rebuked Jesus, only to be called Satan for even tempting with the thought of resurrection without crucifixion (Mark 8:32-33). Peter did not expect Messiah to go to Jerusalem in order to die.

Let Him Deny Himself, and Take Up His Cross Daily, and Follow Me... - A cross was an instrument of tortuous death imposed by the Romans when Caesar or his political reign was threatened or disobeyed. But Jesus wasn't talking about denying obedience to Caesar; He was demanding the removal of another lord: self. If Jesus was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, then His disciples must also deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. Luke makes clear that this is not a one-time decision, but rather something that disciples must do *daily* (Luke 9:23, 1 Cor 15:31). Before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this seemed impossible for Peter who denied the Lord rather than himself on the night of Jesus' arrest (Luke 22:54-62). After Pentecost, Peter, filled with the Spirit of Christ, was pleased to suffer for His name (Acts 5:29-32, 40-41). Tradition teaches us that Peter himself was crucified, probably fulfilling the words of Jesus during his restoration (John 21:18-19).

For Whoever Loses His Life for My Sake (and the Gospel's) Will Save It... - Misunderstood, this verse can sound like we have to die a martyr's death as the means of our salvation. But believing in salvation by grace through faith does not deny what Jesus is saying here (Eph 2:8-9), rather, it establishes it (Eph 2:10). Jesus makes clear that there is a horrible rate of return for one who strives to gain the world at the expense of his soul (Mark 8:36-37). And most men don't even do that well at gaining the world. Finally, Jesus makes clear that if we are embarrassed about Jesus (including His *words*) here, we will find that He will be ashamed of us before His holy angels there.

Daily Cross-bearing 101 – This passage often sets us thinking of whether we, like Peter, would deny knowing Christ if we felt our life was threatened. In our imaginations we wonder if we could handle it *then*. But that is denial at an event in the *possible future* and not so much *daily* cross-bearing. We also think of “being ashamed” of Jesus in particular events of witnessing or not compromising in a peer-pressure situation. But *daily* denial is more about setting aside self-as-lord in the mundane situations of life (i.e. with your husband, wife, children, parents, siblings, teachers, students, friends, etc.).

Cross-Humility – In another passage, Paul teaches of the humiliation of Jesus coming in the flesh to suffer on the cross for us (Phil 2:5-8). This is given as a copy to follow for something as simple and *daily* as this: “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Phil 2:3-4). Bearing your cross is certainly connected to how you live “out there” in the world; but it starts right here, right now, daily, in the private, close, communal relationships of family and church.

When Christ Took Up the Cross – He paid for others sins (love covers a multitude of sins). ...He extended grace to those who were His enemies...He forgave those who were sinning against Him...He obeyed His Father no matter the cost...He covered personal offenses against Him...He did not defend His reputation, but trusted the Father's future vindication... - This is what it means to “*deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*”

Joy in the Cross – Jesus never endured the cross as an ascetic, as an end in and of itself; nor should we. He endured the suffering because He knew of a greater joy that would be His on the other side of the suffering (Heb 12:1-2). Taking up a cross means believing in a God Who has your good and glory in mind in every moment of suffering ordained for you (Rom 5:1-5, James 1:2-4).

Mercy in the Daily Cross – Taking up your cross does not mean that tomorrow and the next day you have a bunch more work to do to prove to God you are worthy of being saved or that you really mean it when you say that you are His follower – that kind of legalistic mindset is part of what needs to die. Taking up your cross means that you deny any ability to save yourself and fall completely upon the mercy of Another's righteousness. It means you are coming, like Jesus, to the One Who will make everything right in His perfect time and way – because you know you cannot. It means you don't have to figure out all the “whys” of this trial and that because your faith rests in God, believing *that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Heb 11:6).