

The Cross You Carry Series

March 30, 2022

Scripture: Mark 8:34, Mark 15:16-22

34And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**

16And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band.

17And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his *head*,

18And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!

19And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing *their* knees worshipped him.

20And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

21And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

22And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.

Summary: Whoever desires to come after me;

(1) let him deny himself,

(2) take up his cross, and

(3) follow me.

The Cross You Carry

During Lent we come face to face with the cross Christ died upon to save us from our sins.

In the text read this evening, Jesus, exhausted and weakened by the beatings he's endured, collapses under it weighton the way to Golgotha. The Roman soldier in charge looks around at the crowd and sees strong-bodied Simon standing as a spectator to Jesus' suffering.

The soldier withthe law on his side orders Simon of Cyrene to pick up the cross and carry it.

No choiceis offered, no fee is paid – it is a pure and simple case of recruitment- take this cross and carry it- no ifs, ands, or buts –do it.

It doesn't take much thinking to conclude that most of the crosses you and I bear today come about the same way- not necessarily by a soldier ordering us but because of life's circumstances. There you were one moment carefree, going about your day to day business and then came a heart attack or stroke.

At work it was the simple change of a new boss who replaced your old boss, and the new boss is a horror to work for.

Take a marriage where one partner is faithful and hardworking and the other runs around and is addicted to some bad habits.

It could be something as simple as a child who neverseems to listen to a mother-in-law who must always have the last word.

One thing isobvious to you- you have a cross to bear not of your doing or liking and not with any near term end in sight.

At least Simon of Cyrene knew that when he gotto the top of the hill this cross was leaving his shoulder.

But Job you remember, good and righteous Job, struck down by the loss of his children, his wealth, his physical health; week after week, month after month sits in agony with his boils surrounded by a broken home and uncomfortable friends.

We know what eventually happens to Job but what will eventually happen to us and the crosses we bear?

Some people are quiet and resigned to the fact; others are constantly complaining.

Simon never said a word, just picked up the cross and carried it; but Job's suffering was much longer and more painful; he did not hesitate to voice his complaints and to question why he got something he didn't deserve.

As we begin this season of Lent and face the cross, look for a moment at what the Church has done with the cross: stuck it on its' altars and stain glass windows, put it in the hymns and prayers and creeds, has its people wear it as a religious symbol. The Church took this awful, ugly, brutal instrument of shame and death and dedicated it to God.

The Bible says, Lord, what happened on the cross was your work and design done to save us. And so we sing:

In the cross of Christ I glory... When I survey the wondrous cross... Beneath the cross

of Jesus I fain would take my stand....Jesus keep me near the cross...

In Mark 8:34 Jesus says:

Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

From what Jesus said it is clear that He assumed you and I would have a cross to bear. There are three commands given: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

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The three all go together; you can't have one without the other two and still be on the path to the Kingdom of God.

According to what Jesus commands it's the person who doesn't think she or he has a cross to bear that ought to be concerned. If everything is just hunkey-

dorey in your life and you don't have a care in the world, you are off the mark. If you are walking with Christ, you are carrying a cross.

I mentioned earlier that the Church took the cross and dedicated it to the glory of God.

How do you do that with a spouse who has Alzheimer's and no longer knows who you are or with a child who is slowly dying with a rare blood disease or with a family member who rubs you the wrong way but you must live with?

How do I take the cross I bear, and usually there is more than one, and dedicate it to the Lord?

The answer on how is given in the two other commands Jesus gave in following Him.

Whosoever would come after me, let him deny himself...

Self-denial is a must if our cross is going to be dedicated to God; otherwise, we are going to complain and look for sympathy.

The reason we call our burden a cross is because there is pain or suffering or hardship that comes to us from it.

Many people practice self-denial, but it is not self-denial for the will of God.

Like the husband who keeps having pains in his chest from time to time and just ignores them; his wife says you ought to go the doctor and have that checked and he says it's nothing, probably just a little indigestion. That's self-denial all right but there is no passion for God involved. Or take the school situation where a bully picks on a younger student forcing him to give up his lunch money each day and told to keep his mouth shut for fear of retaliations; self-denial all right but neither student has any knowledge of God.

We know a lot about self-denial, just by the fact we may not have enough money we will deny our self that new dress or new car or whatever.

So when Jesus says: whosoever would come after me, let him deny himself, that should neither sound strange or unusual to us, we do that a lot already, but not because we want to love and honor God—that was what Jesus meant-

denying yourself something or someone because the Lord have given me this cross to bear for His glory.

If we can get all this self-denial stuff we do channeled in God's direction instead of my direction, then we will have learned how to dedicate our cross to God.

Take for example the elderly husband who is bedridden at home with a severe case of parkinson's and kidney failure. Her role is now more of a nurse than a wife. Every day she practices self-denial- other things she would like to be doing and having; instead she is caring for him. What is her attitude or understanding toward this cross she bears?

If that wife is a Christian trying to follow the will of God, then in her heart is Romans 8:28 and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. That's a verse that's in her heart and in her mind she is thinking: "God, I'm not sure why my husband, Fred, is in this condition; but as long as I am able and believe it is your will I will care for him.

She could complain but she knows that would grieve the Holy Spirit, because all things work together for good when you are His called and chosen children. And what pity does she need when she is convinced this is God's will for her life at this time.

There is one other command she has yet to obey; remember there were three:

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"...let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." She has certainly denied herself and with God's will in mind; and she has certainly taken up her cross; each day she cares for her ailing husband.

Now you might think that alone is enough to demonstrate her walk with the Lord. But you and I know how easily fears and doubts come in the night.

You and I know that when we are tired from a long day's task, our weakened bodies can easily slip into "why me", "will this ever end".

Following Jesus means more than self-denial even for the right reasons, more than just taking up my cross, following Jesus means keeping my personal

relationship with Him in tact through prayer, bible study, worship, meditation, and the like.

Even the best of saints could not go on bearing their cross for Christ without private devotional time and worship. They would suffer from “burnout”, fear, or discouragement.

Do you think Jesus could have reached Golgotha without having spent so much time in prayer with the Father beforehand? Following Jesus means being yoked, hooked up with Jesus, like a two person team pulling the load together- sharing the burden of the cross together.

Psalm 55:22 says: “Cast your burden on the Lord and He shall sustain you...”

When we daily pray and worship, study and meditate on the Word, we bring ourselves in whatever state we are into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. And it should not surprise us to find strength to go on for another day or peace in the midst of our unhappy or unwanted circumstances.

I wonder if we would follow Jesus, get hooked up closely with Him, if we did not have a cross to bear?

Some may perhaps for the sake of safety or success. But when we finally get it right, if only for a few moments, like that time Simon of Cyrene walked up the hill to Golgotha carrying the cross for Christ, did he, do we not share in such a time of cross-bearing a genuine love with the Master?

What some have called a foretaste of Heaven yet to come.

Yes, it is Lent and yes we have our crosses to bear- each one of us, and thank God we do. Now we have only to heed our Lord’s command:

“Whosoever desire to come after me, let him/her deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”