

ESF, Lord's day service message
9/2/2018

The Cost of Following Jesus

Mark 8:31-38

³¹He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Some years ago. I bought a new plunger at a dollar store. It was very cheap. I thought I got a good deal. But when I used it the first time, it broke even before I got the job done.

Often, we try to buy something good for a cheap price. But cheap things usually don't have good quality. There are reasons why they are cheap. To get what has good quality we have to pay the proper price. To get anything valuable in our lives, we must pay a price for its value. If we want to get great things, we must pay a great price.

What could be more valuable than anything else in our lives? People may have different ideas of what is the most valuable. But Christians know that salvation of souls and having eternal life is what is the most

valuable. Salvation and eternal life can't be purchased at any price. It is paid by the sacrificial blood of Jesus. And it is given to us as God's gift. But Jesus says that there is a cost which saved believers must pay. It is not the cost to be saved, but the cost to live a spiritually powerful and victorious life, to bear fruit and to give Him glory.

Jesus calls us to be powerful and victorious soldiers for God's kingdom. And, Jesus lets us know up front that there is a commitment that is going to cost us everything. Then what is the cost?

Deny yourself

Jesus says that the first cost we must pay to be His disciples is to deny ourselves. What does the word "deny" mean?

Deny is from the Greek word "*aparneomai*," which means to completely disown oneself from someone. It is the word Jesus used to describe Peter's denial of Him (Matthew 26:34). Three times Peter was confronted about his relationship to Jesus, and each time Peter strongly denied knowing Him (Matthew 26:70, 72, 74). He disowned Jesus openly before people.

That is exactly the kind of denial a believer is to make in regard to himself. He is to utterly disown himself, to refuse to acknowledge the self. Jesus' words here could be paraphrased, "Let him refuse any association or companionship with himself."

The self to which Jesus refers to here is not one's personal identity as a distinct individual. Every person is a unique creation of God, and the heavenly Father knows each of His children by name. He has every believer's name "recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). But the self of which Jesus is speaking here is the natural, sinful, rebellious, unredeemed self. It is the "old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit" (Eph. 4:22)

To deny that self is to confess as Paul does, "*I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh*" (Rom. 7:18). To deny one's self is to have a sincere, genuine conviction that one has nothing in his person to commend before God, nothing worthwhile to offer God at all.

Also, the Greek word for "deny" means to give up on selfish desire. So, denying self means that we renounce the gratification of our own needs and desires. It is to give up our own will which is against the will of God. Denying self means that we renounce our right to run our own lives. We are to deny that we own ourselves. It means that we do not have the final right to decide what we are going to do with our lives.

Jesus is saying, "If you want to be my disciple, you must give up the idea that you are the owner of your life and let me be the owner of your life. Let me be the Lord of your life." The Message Bible translates the phrase of "deny yourself" to "*anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat. I AM.*" 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "*You are not your own; you are bought at a price.*"

Our natural tendency is not self-denial, but self-centered assertion. So, self-denial does not come naturally.

A mother was preparing pancakes for her two sons. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Okay Ryan, you be Jesus!"

We want everyone else to deny themselves while we refuse denying ourselves. We all have things we want. But Christ is calling us to a life of self-denial. Christ is clear that if we want to keep growing as His disciples, we must deny ourselves.

How can we go against our natural tendency of a self-centered mindset and deny ourselves in the crucial moment of decision-making? If we remember how Christ denied himself and let his self-denial come into

our hearts we can deny ourselves. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24- "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*" Jesus denied His own rights. He chose an agonizing death on the Cross to follow God's will. He denied Himself by surrendering His will to God's will with this prayer: "*Father if you are willing, take this cup (suffering and death on the cross) from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*" (Luke 22:42). If we pray as Jesus prayed and surrender our will to God's will as He did, we can deny ourselves.

Take up your cross

To live as fruit bearing disciples of Jesus, while we deny ourselves, we must take up our crosses.

Peter and all other disciples wanted Jesus to be King without the cross. They didn't want him to suffer and die on the cross. Peter wanted to receive the glory of the resurrection but did not want to see Jesus dying on the cross. That's usually what we want to do too. But Jesus said to Peter and all believers that taking up the cross is not an option. It is the only way to share the power and glory of the resurrection.

2 Timothy 2:12 says, "*If we endure, we will also reign with him....*"

E. M. Bounds said, "*All God's plans have the mark of the cross on them and all His plans have death to self in them.*"

Then, what does "taking up your cross" mean?

It means *sacrificing and suffering*

When Jesus said to the disciples, "Take up your cross" the cross wasn't a beloved symbol like it is today. It was big and ugly. It was a heavy, crude device of torture that conveyed a message of shame, suffering, and death. So, taking up your cross means living a life of sacrifice and suffering for Christ. Martin Luther said, "*A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, & suffers nothing, is worth nothing.*"

It means that we should be willing to endure sufferings which may come

to us while we serve Christ. It means that we serve Christ faithfully, even when we lose our own benefits and comforts, are humiliated, or are treated unfairly, and our pride is hurt.

To take up the cross is to experience sacrifice or suffering not once in our life time but every day. It consists of the continual practice of small sacrifices which may be distasteful to us. This involves numerous choices and resolutions in small matters. It is to serve the Lord on a daily basis even if that involves giving up our own needs and preference. You may choose to sacrifice your preference and interests every Sunday to come to church and worship the Lord. You may do this by not working overtime on Sunday, by not having that birthday party on Sunday, by skipping that favorite game on Sunday, etc. Those small sacrificial actions are taking up the cross.

It is *your* cross not other's

Each of us has a personal and particular cross. There is no one who can live a cross-free life. Each of us has some issue, some situation, and some circumstance that must be carried and endured. Usually, the cross you are carrying seems to be heavier and greater than the crosses of others. So, you may wonder why God gives you a cross which is heavier than the crosses of others.

A young man was at the end of his rope. Seeing no way out he dropped to his knees in prayer. "Lord, I can't go on," he said. "I have too heavy a cross to bear." The Lord replied, "My son, if you can't bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then open that other door and pick out any cross you wish."

The young man was filled with relief. "Thank you, Lord!" he sighed, and he did what he was told. Upon entering the other door, he saw many other crosses, some so large the tops weren't even visible. Then he spotted a tiny cross leaning against the far wall. "I'd like that one Lord," he whispered. And the Lord replied, "My son, that is the cross you just brought in."

God has a uniquely blessed plan for you through your cross. As your life is different and unique from all other lives, so your cross is different and unique from the crosses of others.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He came to Peter and told him about the cross he would take later. The cross was that when Peter became old someone else would lead him where he did not want to go. And Peter asked Jesus what kind of cross Jesus would give to the other apostle, John. Jesus answered him, "*If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me*" (Jon 21: 22). Jesus encouraged Peter not to compare his cross with the cross of other disciples, and to believe that the Lord's purpose and blessing in Peter's cross was different from all other disciples' crosses.

Do not compare your cross with other people's crosses. Believe in God's unique blessings through your cross. And take up *your* cross with a thankful heart.

Taking up your cross is *voluntary submission*

In Jesus' time people knew what taking up a cross meant. In those days, a person carried his own cross signified his submission to the power of Rome. Jesus used the illustration of carrying a cross to show the submission required to the authority of the King of kings-Jesus Himself. But, Jesus never forces a person to take up the cross against the person's free will. It is a voluntary form of sacrificial obedience that identifies us completely with Jesus. Bearing our cross is something we deliberately take up and bear.

Garibaldi, the great Italian military hero from the 19th century, raised an incredibly committed volunteer army. When he recruited ordinary people to form a powerful army, he offered only these terms: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country with his heart and not with his lips only, follow me!" Those who accepted Garibaldi's challenge and committed to follow him became powerful soldiers.

Then, how can we take up the cross voluntarily? By believing that the cross is the sure way of final victory, and to participate in the glory of Jesus' resurrection.

Paul testified why he willingly took up his cross in Romans 8:18 *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

Also, in I Corinthians 1:18, *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

In February, 1943, the USAT Dorchester loaded with 902 servicemen was moving across icy waters toward an American base in Greenland. A German submarine fired and struck the ship. The ship's captain gave the orders to abandon ship. Panic and chaos broke out. People jumped into lifeboats. Through all the confusion four Army chaplains brought hope to the soldiers. The four chaplains were, George Fox, Alexander Goode, John Washington, and Clark Poling. They went out among the soldiers offering prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live. They began handing out life jackets. There were no more life jackets left--four frightened young men stood there. The four chaplains took off their own life jackets and handed them to the men. Of the 902 men on board, 672 died including the four chaplains.

They could take up the cross of death not because they were better than other people, not because they had good will for others, but because they believed that death was not defeat, but the door to eternal life. They could take up the cross of death voluntarily because they knew where they were going through death- the glorious presence of God.

If you believe that truth, you also can take up your cross voluntarily and courageously to make your place in history.