



## Exploring God's Love through the Bible:

The Call to Follow Jesus

Dec 11, 2016

### Today's Text (emphasis vv 23-24):

*Luk 9:21 And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing;*

*Luk 9:22 Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.*

*Luk 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

*Luk 9:24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

*Luk 9:25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?*

*Luk 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.*

### Like last week, I have two simple propositions today:

1. Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him, and in doing so, to carry their crosses.
2. This call is a **loving** call; indeed, it is the **Gospel** call...the **MOST loving** call of all.

### THE CALL TO FOLLOW JESUS

1. His great **love** **MUST** be our context when considering His great call.
2. In each Gospel, over and over, Jesus gives the "carry your cross" **command** of all who would truly follow Him. (Luk 14:26-27; Mat 10:38-39, Mat 16:22-25; Mar 8:34-38; Joh 12:25-26)
3. Recently, a brother in the Lord sent me some thoughts on our verses in Luke by Walter Chantry. I was so struck by his words, I'd like to quote him for your encouragement as we consider our Text:

Only **one** entrance may be found to the Kingdom of God. There is a narrow gate set at the head of the path of life. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). No one with an inflated ego can squeeze through the door. **There must be self-effacement, self-repudiation, self-denial, even to become a disciple (a student) of Jesus Christ.**

Our Saviour made His demand quite clear by explicitly requiring self-denial. He then re-emphasized the point by using a vivid illustration of renouncing one's self an illustration he would soon seal with His blood, "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross." Six times in the Gospels our great Prophet refers to His followers' taking up a cross. It was one of His favorite illustrations of self-denial. At other times He would speak of selling all, or of losing one's life.

“Cross” is a word that first brings to our minds the picture of our Lord on Calvary. We think of Him bleeding while fastened to an instrument designed to inflict an agonizing death. Then perhaps we expand the idea of taking up a cross by thinking of Stephen who was stoned to death, or of Peter and John, who were beaten and put into prison, and of other martyrs across the ages. In the light of such courageous physical suffering, the Christian at ease may say to himself, “I don’t have any cross to bear.” Perhaps this repeated demand of Christ even brings alarm to your consciences as you read it over and over in Scripture.

Some who call themselves “Christian” in fact have never taken up their crosses. Being ignorant of the experience of self-execution, of self-denial, they are of necessity **strangers to Christ**. Our Lord Himself intended His illustration and His demand to deepen alarm in such individuals. If this is your condition, then there can be no relief to conviction but in taking up your cross and following Him.

Others, however, are true servants of Christ but feel a sense of dismay through a misunderstanding of our Lord’s demand. It is quite possible to have taken up your cross and not to know it. Careful examination of our Lord’s meaning will then be an encouragement.

In either case, the subject is vital to you. **Your Master’s life was dominated by a cross. He has called you also to a life with a cross.** This clear gospel note is so easy to forget in flabby Western society. With a great chorus of custom, advertisement, and temptation, this world is beckoning you to a life of self-indulgence. Your flesh is drawn to that appeal, and will fall in with the world’s suggestions. But the Lord of glory has called you to a life of self-denial, to a **cross**.

The demand of bearing a cross is *universal*. It is made of **all** who follow Christ, without exception. Our Lord addressed these words “to all,” not to a select few who walked nearer to Christ. Mark 8:34 indicates that this mandate was not issued to the twelve alone. It was spoken ‘when he had called the people unto Him with his disciples’. The cross is required for “any man” who will go after Him. There are no peculiar cases released from this necessity. Repeatedly our Lord was emphatic that none could be considered His disciple in any sense unless he bore a cross. “And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38).

Again in Luke 14:27 our Saviour turned to a multitude following Him, to insist, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.” It is an absolute impossibility to be a Christian without self-denial. Whether you live in a Christian land or in a culture hostile to God’s Word, you must bear a cross.

The only way to avoid the cross is to follow the world to **hell**. As verse 24 explains, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it.” The “for” indicates a connection with the preceding verse. Religion without **self-denial** will not endure the judgment.

It is this most obvious aspect of our Lord’s teaching which has been forgotten or ignored by modern evangelism. Anxious to bring sinners to life, peace, and joy in the Lord, evangelists have failed even to mention that Christ insists upon denial of self **at the outset**. Having failed to pass on our Lord’s requirement, and forgetting it themselves, evangelists have never questioned whether their “converts” with self-centered lives are true followers of Christ.

4. Questions as we consider His call:

- The cross, by its very nature, is **painful**. A Christian must be willing to endure pain for His sake.
- Have you picked up your cross? To do so is an intentional, daily, **decision**.
- What is your response WHEN you face persecutions, misunderstandings, and relational, family/friends, and financial losses for His sake?

A LOVING CALL

- Friends, I'd like to propose that this call to **sacrifice** and self-denial for the glory of Christ is a loving call.
- Christ calls those whom He loves and those who are called in turn, love Christ, and are willing to give up all for Him! This was His standard: "Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."
- I'd also argue that His first followers, the Twelve, saw His call as loving. You can tell by their response to **persecution**:

*...and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name**. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5:40-42)*

- The problem, as we alluded to last week, is often one of the **heart**. Our minds are drawn to the world, which always offers comfort and ease rather than the sometimes harsh demands of the cross.
- Satan tempted our LORD with "All the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." (Luke 4:5) He tempts our hearts away from the cost of following Christ as well. He always lies, "Hath God said?" (Gen 3:1)
- One of my favorite parables illustrates the temptations we face:

*Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;*

*Mat 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matt 13:18-23)*

- So remember, Christ endured the cross because of the **joy** set before Him! (Heb 12:2) There is great purpose, rooted in love, in our cross-bearing:

**Heb 12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

*Heb 12:4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

*Heb 12:5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.*

*Heb 12:6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*

*Heb 12:7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

*Heb 12:8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

*Heb 12:9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?*

*Heb 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.*

**Heb 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

*Heb 12:12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,*

*Heb 12:13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

**Friends, may we learn to see Jesus' call to carry a cross as loving! May we see His Word not as restrictive, but as liberating! May we, by the Holy Spirit, view His commands (and the price we often pay to follow them) as beautiful, as seeds sown for a great harvest, and as down payments for a great reward kept for us in heaven!**

#### FINAL THOUGHTS AND PRAYER

A few final words from Brother Chantry seem fitting:

It is now apparent that Jesus' figure of bearing a cross is an elaboration of His demand for self-denial. **Bearing a cross is every Christian's daily, conscious selection of those options which will please Christ, pain self, and aim at putting self to death.** It is a teaching for the **recruit**, not merely for the seasoned warrior. It is a requirement for **entering** the army of God, not merely a call to an elite corps of "super-saints" with a "deeper life." Yet it does hold the clue as well to deepening maturity in Christ. At each stage of growth, **more** self-denial is required, more painful blows to self, more reckless decision to serve the Lord Christ with consequent abandonment of one's own life.

An image of the cross is discernible everywhere in the Christian life. Our Lord was not speaking in hyperbole when He set before us a daily cross. To turn from it is to revert to the broad way, which leads to destruction.

May we follow Christ in every way that He has chosen. May we be willing to joyfully but dutifully carry our cross as He did, for the glory of God. May we, daily, choose those things that honor Him, while thanking Him for grace when we stumble. May Jesus be pleased with our feeble attempts to love Him the way He loves us.

Amen.