

February 1, 2009
 Romans 1:16-17 / John 12:37-43 / Luke 9:18-27
 Luke (#46) - Confessing Christ (#2)

After I finished last week's message I felt it necessary to follow up that message with at least one more on the same text. Not because you didn't feel bad enough when you left 😊, but because I only got part way through the verses!

I covered Peter's Confession of Jesus as "The Christ of God" in verse 20, and explained what that meant. / I also pointed out how that confession wasn't enough but needed Jesus to give that correct confession the correct content to go along with it (vv. 21-22). / And I also covered what I believe Jesus meant when He told his disciples we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily (v. 23).

But what I didn't get to cover as well as I wanted was "why it is so necessary for us to take up our cross daily" and what the command to "follow Him" encompasses.

Not only that, I never even touched on the grave dangers of being ashamed of Jesus and His words (and the divine response such embarrassment will bring upon us on the day of judgment).

Nor did I even touch on what Jesus meant when He said that some of the people standing before Him that day would "not taste death" before they "saw the kingdom of God"—a point I won't have time to cover today either, but will cover when I get to chapter 10 verses 17-24.

To me that's a lot of stuff to simply skip over due to lack of time! So rather than skip over it and simply move on to the next text, I thought one more message on the text was called for.

So, let me wrap up the point I ended with last week — Jesus demand for cross-bearing / address the issue of what it means to "follow Him" / and go on to the very real dangers of being ashamed of Jesus and His words (and what God will do in regard to us if we are).

So **FIRST**, let's wrap up the issue of cross-bearing. Last week I told you that "Taking up one's cross" did not mean simply putting up with the trials and difficulties that come our way in life, be it an old car, a rebellious teen, a nasty boss, or something of that sort. A cross (as I pointed out last week) meant one thing — an instrument of torture and death!

It was something people were executed on! And carrying it daily meant bearing it to the place of execution daily. It meant being willing, if need be, to suffer shame or torture or death at any given time, on any given day, for Jesus.

Which is, by the way, what the very next verse goes on to say! ***“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses His life for me will save it.”***

Thus, Jesus Himself assures us that “taking up our cross daily” has to do with some type of dying. And in this case most likely in the sense of being willing to accept the very real possibility that following Him, and keeping His words, might at any given time mean having to die for Jesus. He even warned them of that ahead of time in John 16:2: ***“A time is coming,” he said, “when anyone who kills you will think they are doing God a service.”***

And as it turned out they were all killed -- except the Apostle John. All the others ended up dying a martyr’s death for their faithfulness to Jesus.

One was speared, another flayed alive, another shot through with arrows / John Mark was dragged behind horses by ropes / James was thrown down a cliff and then clubbed to death / Paul was beheaded with the sword / Peter was crucified upside down along with 800 other believers on the Appian Way (the main road leading into the city of Rome), and so on.

Yet the disciples did not shy back from such a fate. They were ready for it and could accept it when the time came, because for years they had practiced the discipline of ***“taking up their cross daily.”***

They were able to embrace and endure a very painful and difficult death for Jesus because they had spent years (for some decades) practicing the art of “self-denial” and the discipline of “being ready to die daily for Jesus” if that time should come.

You see, “cross bearing” or “self-crucifixion” is ***NOT*** self-torture (as it’s unfortunately been misinterpreted by some on occasion). / It’s ***NOT*** self-abuse or self-cruelty. / It’s ***NOT*** the purposeful self-infliction of pain, nor is it to be confused with the Buddhist pursuit of trying to do away with the self (or self-annihilation).

What it is, is the spiritual practice of over-coming our very natural, but very enslaving fear of death. A fear which keeps us in spiritual bondage and soul slavery. A fear that must be overcome if we are ever to follow Christ unreservedly or wholeheartedly and grow spiritually.

That, I believe, is why one of the things God does in redemption, according to the author of Hebrews, is ***“free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”*** (Heb. 2:15). The fear of dying keeps us in bondage! It keeps us enslaved! It keeps us bound to the things of the past! It keeps us from taking necessary risks for Jesus.

It keeps the old man in us alive, and prevents the new self created to be in God’s image, from being experienced as fully as it should be!

You see, Jesus says that, ***“A seed can’t grow and produce fruit until it falls into the ground and dies.”*** And in doing so He assures us that death (and in this case I believe He means the death of the old, proud, self-serving, God-resisting self) is the pre-requisite to experiencing new life! That’s one of the paradoxes of Christianity!

Letting the old self die is the only way to truly experience the blessings of the new self! That’s why Paul can tell us in Col. 3:5: ***“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature (that is, your sinful nature): sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed (which is idolatry)... You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived.”***

A life characterized, as he goes on to say, by such things as: ***“Anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips.” “Rid yourselves of all such things as these...”*** That’s what he means by “Putting to death the old self.”

And it’s spoken in contrast to the reciprocal need to put on the new self. ***“Clothe yourselves,”*** says Paul, ***“with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience — forgiving one another just as Christ forgave you, and put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”***

So there we have it. We must be engaged in the daily practice of “putting the old self and its practices to death,” and in its place putting on the new self. A process Paul elsewhere calls the discipline of ***“clothing ourselves with Christ.”***

In order to grow spiritually we must take off one OLD, TATTERED, THREADBARE, DIRTY set of clothes we had been wearing, and put on in their place our graciously provided and NEW, BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN set of clothes!

But what's our natural tendency? We sometimes like the feel of those old clothes — especially guys! And thus our tendency, as I've often found, is to protect and guard the self. It's to keep the old self alive — the lingering vestiges of that proud, selfish, fleshly, sinful self that we used to be before we came to know Christ.

It's the failure to let that old self die that prevents the new self (or the better self) from coming to be the dominant self! The self God by His Spirit is seeking to nurture and grow within us by His grace! The transformed self or the "new creation" He intends for to be (II Cor. 5:17).

That's why He wants us to know that discipleship ***MUST INCLUDE*** a willingness to "***take up our cross daily.***" Every time we attempt to keep aspects of the old self alive (by refusing to forgive, or let past grudges go, by nursing our wounded pride, or holding on to some prohibited pleasure or sinful habit) it prevents us from experiencing the new self as Jesus intends us to be!

It's one of the fundamental principles of new life in Christ! It's one of the necessary aspects of spiritual growth. It's a "must" for any disciple of Jesus, as Jesus makes clear! Not self-abuse. Not self-mutilation or self-hatred or self-destruction or self-annihilation (as practiced by some Monks or Dessert Fathers or the Ascetics who would whip and flagellate themselves)! But a gradual crucifixion of whatever belongs to the old, proud, sinful self, so that the new self (and whatever belongs to it) may take their place!

Which bring us to our **SECOND** point — the call of Jesus to "follow Me." I told you last week that "taking up your cross and following Jesus meant taking up your cross and following Him to the place of crucifixion." And I believe that in the context that is implied. Just as Jesus carried the cross to His place of crucifixion, so we must be willing to carry the cross, the instrument of crucifixion, to the place of crucifixion, daily. But following Jesus can also be seen in a slightly different way, since Jesus call to "follow Him," is also His favorite evangelistic appeal as well as another word for obeying Him in all things.

When Jesus called people to a life of discipleship, or to be a Christian, or to enter the kingdom, or to come to salvation, He didn't simply call them to believe! He did do that on occasion, but in general His call was simply: "***Come follow Me.***"

When Jesus finds Simon Peter and Andrew casting nets into the Sea of Galilee, and purposes to make them His disciples, His invitation is simply: "***Come, follow me.***"

When He finds Philip the call is the same: *“Come, follow me.”* When He meets Levi the tax collector, sitting at his booth, the call is: “Follow me.”

To the man wanting to stick around and bury his dead father (which really meant to stick around and settle his father’s estate or collect his inheritance), Jesus says: *“Let the dead bury the dead. Come follow Me.”*

To the rich young ruler who sought salvation, Jesus response was, *“Give all you have to the poor, and then come, follow me.”*

WHY? Because for Jesus, the call to follow Him was the call to salvation! That’s what John MacArthur points out in his book “The Gospel According to Jesus.” For Jesus the call to discipleship was the call to salvation. The call to follow Him was the call to be saved.

For Jesus there was no two stage call, whereby one was asked to believe in order to be saved, and then if they wanted to they could enter into a life of discipleship and obey or follow Him — the second part having little or nothing to do with salvation.

That’s not the Gospel according to Jesus! Because for Jesus salvation and discipleship were never meant to be separated from each other, as if you could be “saved,” and then choose not to be or become a disciple!

For Him, to be saved was to be a disciple, and to be a disciple was to be saved — something Jesus kept together by simply calling people to “follow Him.”

MacArthur even goes as far as to say: *“Salvation and discipleship are the same thing. Following Jesus and being saved are the same thing. The call to follow Jesus is a call to salvation.”*

It was a message (book) he felt compelled to write back in 1988 in light of the prevailing idea that you could have Jesus as your **SAVIOR** by believing (for fire-insurance purposes) and then later on in your life or years down the road (as if obedience was somehow an optional extra not connected to salvation at all) you could make Him **LORD** if you wanted to, by obeying Him — an unbiblical concept, he says, that separated what Jesus always kept joined together!

And though I may not agree with MacArthur in every point, it is true: You can’t have Jesus as Savior and not as Lord, any more than you can have Jesus as Lord but not as Savior, since

salvation comes by confessing Him Lord — something we do with our lips and also with our lives
— by trusting and obeying.

MacArthur is right. For Jesus to say, “Anyone who comes after me must deny himself, take up His cross and follow me,” is the same as saying, “Anyone who wants to be saved must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me in a life of discipleship!”

In fact, just this week I received an email from a former missionary friend in Honduras who limited himself to using Jesus’ evangelistic appeal, because He did not want to “tear asunder what God had joined together.”

He did not want to give people the impression that they could have salvation apart from being a disciple, or could have Jesus as Savior without ever being concerned about obeying Him as Lord. Thus his evangelistic invitation was always the same: “It was an invitation to come in faith and follow Jesus in a life of discipleship — since discipleship is salvation.”

Listen: We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone (as I’ve said before), but not by a faith that remains alone! Obedience is the fruit of faith, and anyone who is truly saved will exhibit it to some degree. That’s why Jesus says *“Anyone who would come after me, **MUST...** follow me.”*

It’s also (I believe) why Jesus evangelistic invitation was nearly always spoken in the imperative or command form — “Come, follow Me.” On occasion making it perfectly clear that if called upon to do so, “they must be willing to leave anything or everything near and dear to them and follow Him.”

You see, Jesus doesn’t make bargains! He doesn’t plead with people as if He’ll be hurt if they reject His offer. He doesn’t permit partial commitments or make exceptions for people who feel His demands are too stringent!

He doesn’t barter with people who say:

“I’ll follow you only if You let me first go bury my father.” / “Only if You’ll let me hold onto this pet sin I have or that cherished idol that I love.” / “Only if You’ll promise to let me pursue all my dreams and do the things I really want to do.” / “Only if You’ll promise me I’ll never have to be missionary, or give away all my riches, or be a pastor, or speak in public, or suffer persecution or die a painful death for my commitment to you.”

Jesus isn't in the business of making deals with people! The call to salvation is not "Come, Let's Make a Deal!" It's "Come Follow Me!" It's a call to believe and obey and submit and repent and do things on God's terms, since we, as offending sinners, have no merit or moral leg to stand on from which to barter! The convicted criminal doesn't bargain with the judge!!!

No! God gives the authoritative invitation and says "these are the terms" and "this the way it will be." He doesn't beg. He doesn't lessen the terms of the covenant hoping that more will embrace it if He makes it less stringent or demanding.

We even see that in relation to Peter in John 21. After telling Peter that he would end up being martyred, he said to him: "***Follow Me.***" Then he asks Jesus about John and says, "***What about him?***" And Jesus says: "***If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.***"

In other words, "JOHN is going to get too live to a ripe old age, but YOU are going to die a painful death for your commitment to me, Peter. You'll be martyred (along with your wife and many others) for your faithfulness to me (crucified upside down). But I say to you, in spite of all that, "Follow Me." I'm not going to change things to suit you."

He doesn't barter with Peter. He simply tells him that's the way it is. That's what will be required of you, Peter — but I'm telling you — "Follow me anyway." After all, He adds, "what is it to you" if I let him live and call you to die? If I call him to glorify me by living, and you to glorify me by dying a martyrs death, hat is that to you?

You see, as I said last week, it's not about us — it's about Him, and His glory, and His objectives, and His purposes, and His kingdom, and His cause, and His honor, and His glory and the praise of His name! We're simply called to be soldiers in His army.

And yes, I know the dangers of using "militaristic language" in reference to the Church, and how it has led to very unchristian aggression on the part of Christians. But one thing it has going for it is that good soldiers are trained to understand that they are expendable, and called to sacrifice themselves for the success of the mission, or greater good, when need be.

They are taught and they know it's not about them! It's about their country and the task at hand. The same is true for the disciples of Jesus. He calls us to an UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT TO HIM that holds nothing back — NOTHING!

A commitment that will take any risk, make any sacrifice, forego any personal dream or desire, and do whatever is necessary for the kingdom of God.

A commitment that is willing to endure suffering and shame for His name / lose the approval of family and friends if need be / leave country and homeland for some God-forsaken field of service / or give up the safety and comfort of familiar surroundings if asked to.

A commitment that is willing to divest ourselves of wealth and inheritances if called on to do so / obey Jesus even when its unpopular to do so / share the Gospel even when people will laugh and ridicule us / deny our wants to supply our neighbors needs / and even sacrifice our lives when love calls us to lay down our lives for Jesus or our friends.

“Come,” says Jesus, “and follow me.” Nothing more is necessary, and nothing less will do! It’s His call to believe and obey and be saved and embrace a life of discipleship — the entire Gospel all packed into one simple but powerful invitation!

Then **LAST**, Jesus warns against the danger of being ashamed of Him and His words, adding the additional warning that if we are, He (the Son of Man) will be ashamed of us *“when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels.”*

What does it mean to be “ashamed of Him and His words” (or His teachings)? It means just the opposite of “Confessing Him.” To “confess Christ” is to own Him. It’s to declare your allegiance to Him. It’s to want people to know that you believe in Him and are proud to be known as His disciple. It’s an act of love and adoration and appreciation and worship, whereby you choose to publicly honor Him with your words and by your life.

To be “ashamed of Him or His words,” on the other hand, is to be embarrassed to say, or have people know you believe in Him, or what He says, or follow Him, or obey His teachings. There’s even a sense in which “shame” means to turn away from something, or to lower the head when having something discovered about you — in this case the fact that you have decided to follow Jesus.

Ever gone to a party, where people are trouncing Jesus or making fun of Christians, and hoped no one finds out you’re “one of them”?! That you could “get away” or fly under the radar and remain undetected? That’s being ashamed of Him and His words.

Ever sat in on a class at college, where the professor poked fun at Christianity (and the entire class nodded in approval) as he or she painted Christianity as the source of all social ills, and suggested it was a faith that only illiterate, unthinking people who needed a crutch to lean on would embrace? Did it make you hesitant to admit that you were such a person?

If so, that's being ashamed of Him and His words.

Or maybe this is a more common scenario. You're somewhere where they already know you're a Christian, and you compromise your witness for Christ by engaging in something you know to be sinful behavior just to show them that although you claim to be a Christian, it doesn't stop you from joining in and having a little sinful fun on the side?

Because that's also a way of expressing shame at the teachings of Jesus that forbid you from engaging in the sin and sensual pleasures that the world feels completely free to engage in.

I even spoke to one man this summer who told me how hard it was for his son to live out his faith as a young man on the campus the secular college he was attending in California, because all the girls were continually making fun of him, and calling him gay, because he wouldn't sleep with them!

You see, such things are done to try and shame us, or make us feel ashamed of Jesus, or His teachings. Don't let it happen! Those things are all part and parcel of what Jesus tells us to expect. They're part of what it means to follow Jesus.

In fact, Jesus tells us to expect it — and in the face of it remain unashamed, both of Him, and our faith in Him, and our obedience to His commands!

Which means what? Being a Christian requires having a backbone. It means being willing to lose the respect and approval of other people — maybe even friends or relatives. It means you may get picked on, ridiculed, made fun of, laughed at, or left out of the will.

You may even discover that when people don't like Jesus and they find out you're one of His followers, they redirect all that animosity toward you! Expect it. But whatever you do, don't allow it to make you ashamed of Jesus or His teachings!

Because Confessing Christ means being willing to bear shame for the sake of His name, just as He bore the shame of your sins and is proud to call you His own!