

### Live Life Bigger - Knowing You're Ready To Face Death

Last week we began this nine-part teaching series. The first step to take if you would live life **bigger**, not just **busier**, is to **glory only in the cross of Christ**. Learn to live for what is **essential**. Only Christ can be permanently held and treasured. It is not enough to **believe** in the cross of Christ as some point of religious doctrine.

Today I want to continue talking about the cross, but in a different light. Today I want to try, however imperfectly, to instill a passion, not just for **glorifying in Christ's cross**, but in **bearing your own cross**:

**Mark 8:34** - "And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." This truth was so important to Jesus He took the time to restate the same idea negatively as well as positively: **Luke 14:27** - "Whoever does **not** bear his own cross and come after me **cannot** be my disciple."

We must never yield to the temptation to take the **cost** and the **heat** and the **passion** out of those words. It **costs** to make Jesus look like our ultimate treasure. Life did not go smoothly for Jesus and He said it would not go smoothly for us either: **Matthew 10:25** - "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul [chief or head of demons], how much more will they malign those of his household."

Here is the thesis of this whole message: **If you live your whole life running from the cost and pain of bearing your cross in this world you will waste your whole life**. This means if you look for an **easy** life you will waste your life. If you look merely for a **comfortable** life you will waste your life.

There is something else we need to remember as we begin this study on bearing our cross daily. When Jesus talked about His disciples **bearing their cross** as they followed Him, He wasn't in any way talking about enduring the ordinary hardships and pains that come to everyone in this world. He was talking very specifically about the **cost of following Him in this world**. And He **defined** that cost when He said He was **hated** and **persecuted** and **marginalized** and **maligned** and **slandered** and even **deserted by his closest friends** in this world. That's what He was calling us to when He invited us to link up our lives with His.

I have two thoughts - rather ironic thoughts - on how disciples live big lives by the way they die - both **during** their earthly lives, and at its **end**. We'll look at one this week and one next:

- 1) **Taking up our cross in this life is the way we can most fully display Christ's magnificence before the watching world. Hence, it is the way we most fully love God and man.**

Consider the way this world celebrated Thanksgiving. Everyone is called to pause and be mindful of the bounty and blessing we enjoy in our land. This call to thankfulness is usually trumpeted with no reference at all as to Whom we should give our thanks. So, even in this godless world, there is nothing **stunningly distinctive** about the virtue of thankfulness for blessings. There is no red flag, pointing heavenward when people appreciate the blessings of life. But when Christians willingly embrace loss or ridicule or persecution, specifically for the Name of Christ Jesus, people immediately see that we value Christ **more** than we value life itself.

This is something we must ponder deeply as Christians. Probably, if you've been raised up in the church, you're not hearing this call to **"take up your cross"** for the very first time. We've all heard this before. But usually we've heard about bearing our cross as the **result** of glorifying Christ in this godless age. We've all heard that there is a price to pay if we would follow Jesus, and bearing our cross is that price.

What we haven't heard anywhere near enough is that bearing our cross in this world is not only the **result** of glorifying Jesus, but the **means** of glorifying Jesus as well. This is because the world isn't all that impressed when you are grateful for riches.

But they **do** take notice when we joyfully choose Christ over all the world's admiration, esteem, and pleasure. They **do** notice when we treasure Christ more than life itself. They **do** notice when we **act** like Christ is the greatest joy and treasure that can ever be had. In other words, the **cost** of following Christ in this world is the **means** of making Him great in the world's eyes.

You can see this so clearly in the New Testament record. The Greek root behind the word **"witness"** is the word **"martyr."** The witness comes from laying down the life. The **cost** becomes the **light**. This is what Jesus meant when He spoke to Peter one day about the nature of Peter's coming death:

**John 21:18-19** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." [19] (This he said to show by what kind of death **he was to glorify God**.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Notice the way John records that Peter's death was going to **"glorify God"**(19). Peter's death was going to **glorify God** because it would prove Peter loved Christ **more** than he loved his own life. Peter didn't **have** to die a martyr's death, just like you don't **have** to avoid

ungodliness if you don't want to. You can choose sin and self over Christ anytime you want. But because Peter **freely chose** to lay down his life rather than deny Christ, his death showed the magnificence of Christ to the world. Peter's death **glorified God**. Taking up our cross is the **means** of glorifying God.

You can see this again at the death of Stephen in the book of Acts. Stephen is in serious trouble because he is proclaiming Christ. The religious leaders can't stand the narrow-mindedness of Stephen. Surely there are other roads to God beside Jesus Christ. You can read the flaming account in Acts 6 and 7.

Stephen won't change his mind or his message. He proclaims the Scriptures - **their own Jewish Scriptures** - to the religious leaders. They become so infuriated with Stephen that they **"....cried out with a loud voice and covered their ears...."** It's not an easy thing to shut the truth of God out of your life, but people still go to almost any length to do it. Then they rushed at Stephen and crushed him alive with huge stones. Stephen dies praying for their forgiveness.

Stephen didn't **have** to die like this. He didn't **have** to carry this cross. But he valued Christ more than he valued his own life. His death glorified God because it made much of Christ. And a man named Saul (who was about to have more than just his name changed) saw the whole thing.

Beware of theologies that **fixate on the blessings** to the point of **minimizing the cost** of following Jesus because if there is no **cost** - if we shun **cross-bearing** - we have no observable way to magnify Christ in this world. We'll be limited to the words of our worship songs.

I close with this. And I'm thinking particularly of those with much of this earthly life still ahead of them. I wish I had learned earlier than I did that Jesus' words about taking up our cross daily - about taking up our cross daily **because** it was impossible to follow Him unless we did - I wish I had learned earlier that those words weren't **sad** words or **depressing** words or **empty** words.

I now know it's perhaps **the** mark of spiritual immaturity to avoid those words - to never actually drill down into them to the point of **applying them** to my daily choices, purchases, friendships, habits, entertainment, conversations, choice of language, and entertainment. I wish I had seen earlier that Jesus was trying His best to push my life into a **bigness** that my carnal instincts naturally avoid.

But once you've tried it - once you've taking just the first baby steps with that cross on your back - there's no going back to that old, cluttered, wasted life.