



## The Greatest Challenge of The Cross

**Matthew 16:24-25 KJV** Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. [25] For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

**Romans 12:1-2 KJV** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

### I. INTRODUCTION -- THE CROSS

-The Cross of Calvary is perhaps the most powerful reference point in the Bible. The Cross of Christ is the hope of all ages. It was pointed to by the prophets, it was the hope of the Old Testament saints, it was despised by the Pharisees and Sadducees, it was a "stumbling-block" for the Jews, and it was "foolishness" to the Greeks.

-It has become the central point of salvation to the Church. The place at Calvary is not bound by the limitations of time. The Cross will never be bound by the prejudices of men. It continues to tower as a great, mountain beacon pointing out a clear direction of purpose for the church. In addition to that, it still has the power to save men from their sins.

-Yet with that power of the Cross, there is also a repulsiveness that comes with the Cross. The huge difficulty with this Cross concept, is that it is hard for our generation to swallow something that will demand change in thinking, lifestyle, and outlook.

-The fact of the matter is that the Cross is outrageously offensive. "You want me to do what?" I am sometimes asked by incredulous voices. "I want you to live a Cross-Centered life!"

-That is the Greatest Challenge of the Cross.

-Despite the matter of the Cross being shameful, antagonizing, and even militant. . . . there is only one way for us to be saved and that is by the application of the blood of Christ to our lives.

### II. THE WORDS OF JESUS CONCERNING THE CROSS

**Matthew 16:24-25 KJV** Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. [25] For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

-The words of Jesus were for men not to allow the cross to become stationery and static in their lives. The cross had to be moving all the time. It had to be the foremost theme of the life of the disciples. I must take my cross with me everywhere I go.

-This Scripture goes completely against the orientation of consumer-based ideas that pervade our society today.

-The first requirement of being a disciple is self-denial. The second requirement is to take up the Cross. This is placing a man on the path of a willing death-march. The death that comes is to his flesh, desires, opinions, and choices.

-This is the Greatest Challenge of the Cross.

-The Lord places certain stipulations on the lives of the true disciples. There are numerous values that we can receive if we are willing to let the cross of Christ move into every aspect of our lives.

-If you notice in the following passage in Matthew, the all important question is posed there. *What will a man give in exchange for his soul?* It is far better for a man to be willing to bear the Cross now and to have a safe soul than to shirk the duty of cross bearing and lose his soul.

## **A. The Power of the Cross According to Scripture**

-The Cross has the ability to settle our lives and provide stability for the saint of God. The Word of God provides us with a great picture of what the Cross is able to do.

### **1. It has the power to forgive sin.**

**1 John 1:7 KJV** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

**1 Corinthians 1:17-18 KJV** [17] For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. [18] For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

-The Cross has the ability to erase sin from our lives.

-When sin invades your life, whether the failure was created by your own failure or by an inability to resist temptation, build a cross.

**Revelation 12:11 KJV** And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. . .

**1 Peter 1:18-19 KJV** Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; [19] But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

-There is power in the blood of the Lamb. We sing it but do we really believe it???

### **2. There is reconciliation through the Cross.**

-The sins of man have created a vast gulf between God and man. We live in a society that cannot understand the peace of morality all because of the prevalence of sin. But the Cross has the ability to restore back the relationship with God some that we can really know Him.

**Ephesians 2:16 KJV** And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

-Why would we want a restoration back with God? Because there is the relationship that Adam enjoyed with God to pursue. Once the relationship has been restored then we may know Him.

### **3. There is peace in the Cross.**

**Colossians 1:20 KJV** And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.

-We live in a world that does not know the peace that true salvation brings.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms,

What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarm, leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

-The devil would like to rip our marriages apart and destroy our families with the stress of this hour. He would like for you to believe that there is no heaven for the triumphant Christian. He would like for you to worry about the school systems and the political systems (we should pray for them!!). He would like to rob you of all of your peace. But there is a remedy, it's called Calvary. Build a Cross in your life. Take up your Cross and follow Jesus.

### **4. We may glory in the Cross.**

**Galatians 6:14 KJV** But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

-There can never be any pride to rise up in our hearts regardless of what position that God places us in. We are not to glory in our own accomplishments but rather glory in the Cross. Any accomplishment in our lives will be because of the blessings of God and not our own ingenuity.

-There are some marks in our lives that the Cross has brought to us.

**Galatians 6:17 KJV** From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

-There is a stigmata of the Cross in our lives. There are the branding marks that make others look to our lives and say that Jesus Christ lives in that heart. Because there are some marks of Calvary in our lives then we may look can look the devil boldly in the eye and tell him that we are going to be beneficial in the Kingdom of God.

-There is an old song that I used to sing that has so much power in it:

To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus,

On earth I long to be like Him,

All through life's journey, from earth to glory,

I only ask, To be like Him.

### **III. TYPOLOGY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT**

-Yet there are some who take this idea and concept of Calvary lightly. They want a cross that they can wear around their neck, keep on a key chain, or let it stay on the rearview mirror in their car. They don't want a cross that moves with them through life. They want a cross they can take anywhere and without any difficulty.

-They want an experience that will not isolate them from the world but will not isolate them from God either. It will never work. Elijah stood boldly in the Old Testament and issued a question, "Why halt ye between opinions. . ."

-This is the Greatest Challenge of the Cross.

-If Calvary has not caused you to separate yourself from some things, if the Cross has not caused you to turn away from some associations, if there has been no separation from the world, then I question whether or not you have really come to the experience that you really need.

-No one can make enough rules and regulations to make you live for God in this generation. The fact of the matter is this: You must develop such a relationship with God that is Cross-centered.

-If we can ever really understand the cost of the Cross, I believe it has the ability to help us to live for God in a far more powerful way.

#### **A. The Specifics of God**

-When Moses ascended up Mt. Sinai and received the Law, God clearly defined to him the way that things were to be set up. Every aspect of the Tabernacle was given, every detail of ceremonies and feasts were defined, and every dietary stipulation was documented by Moses.

-Why would God be so specific about things back then? The answer is that He was developing a pattern.

-There is a reason that we live up to the commands of the New Testament for salvation and for doctrine. God always will look to see if the plans were followed exactly as they were commanded to.

· You can fall for the line, "Oh, that was just a custom back then and it is not important for us today."

· You can believe, "Oh, tongues are just a gift" if you want.

· You can believe, "Oh it doesn't really matter how you are baptized, it's just so you get immersed" if you want.

-But I will never believe that!

- God was too specific with Noah and his boat.
- God was too specific with Moses and his Tabernacle.
- God was too specific with Ezekiel and his Temple.
- God was too specific with John and his Revelation for me to believe that any old way will do.

## **B. The Alignment of the Tribes**

-Not only was God specific about how everything was to be built, he was also specific about the way that Israel was to travel.

-Numbers 4 concerns itself with what the different orders of the priests are to do. One finds the responsibilities of Aaron's sons, of the Kohathites, of the Gershonites, and of the Merarites. God had specifically ordered how the Tabernacle was to travel.

-In Numbers 2, there is a very interesting command about the position of the tribes when they came to a stopping point. The Tabernacle was to sit in the middle of the surrounding tribes.

- On the north, the tribes of Asher, Dan, and Naphtali were to form a camp.
- On the south, the tribes of Simeon, Reuben, and Gad were to set up their tents.
- On the east side, the tribes of Zebulun, Judah, and Issachar were to rest.
- On the west end, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh were to place themselves.

-The positioning from overhead would provide a formation of a cross. So with all of Israel's travels, they would have a moving cross. The typology that exists here is a great lesson to us. It is imperative that we have a moving cross at every point in our lives.

-You would think that a moving cross in the lives of the Israelites would have prompted them before they found themselves in sin but then they did not know of the power of Calvary.

-But even today, some carry their cross along with them but it has no effect on their life. There is a very sobering passage in Hebrews that should cause us to take notice of carrying a cross that has no power:

**Hebrews 6:6 KJV** If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

## **C. Taberah**

-There were several places that Israel stopped during their journey of circles. There are some valuable lessons in looking at the places where they stopped. When they stopped moving, their "cross" stopped moving. Their Cross became static and stationery.

-Specifically the book of Deuteronomy gives to us what happened at three places where the cross quite moving:

**Deuteronomy 9:22 KJV** And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibrothhattaavah, ye provoked the LORD to wrath.

-Taberah was the place where Israel began to complain. The Bible does not say that their manna failed or that some enemy had attempted to conquer them, there was just a feeling of dissatisfaction that began to exist in their minds and soon the whispers of discontent gained a voice.

-The same can be true with our own lives. The causes of our complaints can be numerous. Little difficulties began to prey on our minds. Little acts of selfishness on the parts of others began to detain us from worship.

-The complaining soon turns into a habit and the discontent begins to rob of us the power of the cross that moves in our lives. Once the habit has us, the complaining is less mischievous and no longer bothersome as when we first began.

- Spiritual life becomes feeble.
- Prayer becomes a labored task.

- Bible reading becomes boring.
- Church attendance is replaced by the more important things in our lives.
- Soon our faithlessness begins to erode the confidence and trust of others.

-At Taberah, God was provoked to wrath. Complaining kills the cross in our lives.

-The meaning of Taberah is burning. Taberah was the place in the wilderness where the fire of the Lord burned some of the outlying areas of the camp as a punishment for the complaining (Numbers 11:1-3; Deuteronomy 9:22).

-Once the Cross stops moving in our lives, we begin to decay spiritually.

### **1. An Illustration -- Sacrifice Will Help Us Keep Moving**

George Studd was a Pentecostal convert who married Clyde and Olive Haney (Bro. Haney's parents). He had two brothers and they lived in England. The three of them were converted and although they were very skilled cricket players, they turned their backs on this lifestyle and became missionaries. C. T. Studd was actually the most famous of the brothers. In the course of time, George received the Holy Ghost and gained the revelation of the Mighty God in Christ and of Jesus' Name baptism.

During those early years, Bro. Studd would stay with the Haney's when they lived in Pasadena, California. He lived in Los Angeles and would ride the street car to Pasadena very early on Sunday morning to be able to preach Clyde Haney's church. On Sunday afternoon, Bro. Haney said that he would watch Bro. Studd walk back and forth in one of the rooms, seemingly talking to himself. Bro. Haney said that once he asked his father why it was that Bro. Studd was always talking to himself. Bro. Clyde Haney told his son, "That man walks with God and he is talking with Him all the time."

Another time, Bro. Studd asked Bro. Clyde Haney to take him to San Diego because he had a place that he needed to go to. They pulled up in front of a vacant lot that had a little shack on the backside of it. Bro. Studd went in and told Bro. Haney that he would not be long. When Bro. Studd returned to the car, he had a large wallet that was filled with money. Bro. Studd explained that this woman washed and ironed clothes and saved everything she had to give to missionaries.

By the time that Bro. Studd had died, he had literally given away everything that he had monetarily to missionaries so that they would be able to reach the lost who were overseas.

-It will be men like this that we are stacked up against in judgment. We are going to be polled against saints who were more concerned with what they could do for Jesus Christ and His Church. . . . rather than what the Church could do for them!

### **D. Massah**

-Another place that the Cross stopped moving was at Massah.

-To go to Massah we will have to retreat to the other side of the Mt. Sinai. Massah was before Moses had received the details of the Law, but it still warrants a visit from us.

-Massah was the place where Israel began to become rebellious. It was the place in the wilderness where they began to underestimate their God. They began to proclaim among themselves that they were going to die in the wilderness from thirst.

-The stunning question that they asked is found in Exodus 17:7, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

-There is always a progression in our lives when the Cross begins to lose its effect. First we complain about the things around us. Once we are reliable complainers there is a graduation of sorts to rebellion. Never encourage your doubt it only will cause you to make an improper spiritual decision.

-Massah was a place of rebellion against Moses. It was a place of no water. They had a very short memory for just a few days earlier they had been at Marah where the waters were bitter. God had a remedy for that by making the water drinkable. God also had a remedy for no water.

-They had forgotten the cloud by day and the fire by night. They had forgotten the deliverance at the Red Sea. God's remedies are always on time.

-When we began to walk by sight instead of faith, rebellion is lurking around the corner wanting us to make things happen our way.

### **1. Am I A Soldier of the Cross -- Isaac Watts**

-Isaac Watts wrote a hymn that has some very powerful words in it:

Am I a soldier of the cross,  
A follower of the Lamb,  
And shall I fear to own His cause,  
Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize,  
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;  
Increase my courage, Lord.  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
Supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints in all this glorious war  
Shall conquer, though they die;  
They see the triumph from afar,  
By faith's discerning eye

When that illustrious day shall rise,  
And all Thy armies shine  
In robes of victory through skies,  
The glory shall be Thine.

-“On Flowery beds of ease. . .” Its quite difficult to demand rights, benefits, and perks when we realize what the previous generations have put into delivering this Gospel to us in the manner that they have.

### **E. Kibroth-hataavah**

-Kibroth-hataavah was the place where Israel began to lust for unnecessary things.

-Deuteronomy 9:22 is not a list of stations but rather it is a classification of sins. In all three places the sin was the same kind.

- At Taberah, the least sinful, it was for complaining.
- At Massah, it was for complaining for something necessary, water.
- At Kibroth-hataavah it was murmuring for something unnecessary.

-The Bible says that when Israel left Egypt that there were some who went along because they wanted to be saved also. They were not Israelites but are simply described as the "mixed multitude." It was the mixed multitude who "fell a lusting" as the Bible states in Numbers 11:4.

-It happens every time when we began to work in conjunction with the mixed multitude. We must evangelize our world but the world has no business evangelizing the church. The mixed multitude began to cause the Cross to lose its

effect.

-The Bible urges us and encourages the Church to be living members of the Body of Christ, by patient endurance, by goodness, by unwearied zeal, and to attempt to win those who are open to the message of Christ.

-In the Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13, there was an obvious separation among the tares and wheat. In Matthew 24, 25, 26, the last sermon that Jesus would preach was full of the separations that are to exist between the believers and the mixed multitude.

-The mixed multitude who want the blessings of God but not the ties of commitment. The longer that the association with the mixed multitude continues then the weaker that the power of the Cross becomes in your life.

-By the way, the meaning of Kibroth-hataavah is the grave of lust and greed. The progress is from complaining to rebellion to a grave all because the power of the moving cross has been destroyed.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION -- THE FORGOTTEN PRICE OF CALVARY**

-Calvary. . . How have you been moving your cross through life lately? Is there a forgotten price that Calvary has paid? Have I become immune to the sacrifice that was present on the Cross?

-The message that our General Superintendent preached on Thursday night about our calling and our mission caused me to go back and re-evaluate my own relationship with God.

- Our church needs again a fresh look at Calvary.
- Our church again needs to revisit the sacrifice of those old saints who are now in their graves.
- Our church again needs to revisit some of the struggles that it took to bring us to this point that we are now.
- Our church again must understand the greatest challenge of the Cross.

-I conclude with this story that I heard:

Bro. James Kilgore told a story sometime back about a sectional conference that he had attended in the late '70's. This sectional conference was held in a small town outside of Houston. Bro. Kilgore said that when he arrived that there were about 40 ministers or so who were waiting on the conference to get started. The pastor announced to the group as the meeting started that at some point someone had requested to speak to this group of pastors.

When the appointed time came, a man came from the back and walked down the center isle. As he walked down, he pulled off his hat and all of the men inside noted that his overalls were grimy and dirty. He told them that he was the caretaker of a cemetery on the outskirts of town. He had heard that there was a group of Pentecostal preachers who were going to be meeting and he wanted to address them. This man told them that in his cemetery that there was a grave that did not have a marker. At some time in the past it had been marked by a wooden cross but it had long been destroyed by the elements and now there was not a marker at all. He had hoped that these men would be able to give him some money to put a small marker at the grave. Simply put, lying in this unmarked grave was a Pentecostal preacher who had brought the Gospel to some of the neighbors.

Someone asked if he knew who it was. The man said the minister's name was a Reverend Stovall. Bro. Kilgore said that he remembered as a kid when he was in the state of Oklahoma that one evening it had been stormy and raining all day long. In the middle of this storm, a knocking came at the door. Bro. Kilgore's mother went and answered the door and when she did a man was at the front door and had been beaten. His face was bloody and bruised and Sis. Kilgore gasped, "Oh!!! Bro. Stovall please come in!" He waxed and waned in a state of unconsciousness for several days before he finally begin to have his mentation clear up.

The story then came out that he had been preaching in a nearby community and the bullies of the town had threatened him and told him that if he preached there again that they were going to beat him within an inch of his life. He went and preached anyway at the meeting that night. After he preached, they stayed and worked the altars for quite some time. After the altars had cleared, Bro. Stovall started walking down a long dark road toward where he was staying. About half-way, some men jumped on him and started beating him with clubs until they had clubbed him down in the road.

After he had re-gained some of his strength back, he told the Kilgore's that he was leaving and was going back to preach. They asked him where he was going to go and Bro. Stovall told them that he was going back to where he had left off.

The pastors at that meeting took up the necessary money to put a marker on this old soldier's grave.

-It is men like Bro. Stovall and there are numerous others who moved the Cross through their generation. Can this generation do any less?