

The Weight Of The Cross

Philippians 3:17-19

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Question: "What did Jesus mean when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23)?

Answer: Let's begin with what Jesus didn't mean. Many people interpret "cross" as some burden they must carry in their lives: a strained relationship, a thankless job, and a physical illness. With self-pitying pride, they say, "That's my cross I have to carry." Such an interpretation is not what Jesus meant when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

When Jesus carried His cross up Golgotha to be crucified, no one was thinking of the cross as symbolic of a burden to carry. To a person in the first-century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: death by the most painful and humiliating means human beings could develop.

Two thousand years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace, and love. But in Jesus' day, the cross represented nothing but torturous death. Because the Romans forced convicted criminals to carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion, bearing a cross meant carrying their own execution device while facing ridicule along the way to death.

Therefore, "Take up your cross and follow Me" means being willing to die in order to follow Jesus. This is called "dying to self." It's a call to absolute surrender. After each time Jesus commanded cross bearing, He said,

Luke 9:24-25

24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

Although the call is tough, the reward is matchless.

Wherever Jesus went, He drew crowds. Although these multitudes often followed Him as Messiah, their view of who the Messiah really was—and what He would do—was distorted. They thought the Christ would usher in the restored kingdom. They believed He would free them from the oppressive rule of their Roman occupiers. Even Christ's own inner circle of disciples thought the kingdom was coming soon (Luke 19:11). When Jesus began teaching that He was going to die at the hands of the Jewish leaders and their Gentile overlords (Luke 9:22), His popularity sank. Many of the shocked followers rejected Him. Truly, they were not able to put to death their own ideas, plans, and desires, and exchange them for His.

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Rock illustration:

Backpack illustration:

Galatians 6:1-5

King James Version (KJV)

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

Following Jesus is easy when life runs smoothly; our true commitment to Him is revealed during trials. Jesus assured us that trials would come to His followers (John 16:33). Discipleship demands sacrifice, and Jesus never hid that cost.

In Luke 9:57-62, three people seemed willing to follow Jesus. When Jesus questioned them further, their commitment was half-hearted at best.

Luke 9:57-62 King James Version (KJV)

57 And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

58 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have

necks; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

They failed to count the cost of following Him. None was willing to take up his cross and crucify upon it his own interests.

Therefore, Jesus appeared to dissuade them. How different from the typical Gospel presentation! How many people would respond to an altar call that went, "Come follow Jesus, and you may face the loss of friends, family, reputation, career, and possibly even your life"? The number of false converts would likely decrease! Such a call is what Jesus meant when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

If you wonder if you are ready to take up your cross, consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of your closest friends?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of your reputation?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your job?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?

In some places of the world, these consequences are reality. But notice the questions are phrased, "Are you willing?" Following Jesus doesn't necessarily

mean all these things will happen to you, but are you willing to take up your cross? If there comes a point in your life where you are faced with a choice—Jesus or the comforts of this life—which will you choose?

Commitment to Christ means taking up your cross daily, giving up your hopes, dreams, possessions, even your very life if need be for the cause of Christ. Only if you willingly take up your cross may you be called His disciple (Luke 14:27). The reward is worth the price. Jesus followed His call of death to self (“Take up your cross and follow Me”) with the gift of life in Christ:

Matthew 16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Matthew 16:21-24

21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

24 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.

Matthew 10:37-39

King James Version (KJV)

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Mark 10:21

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

Matthew 27:41-43

King James Version (KJV)

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

The cross meant follow through, going all the way, commitment, whatever the cost!