

The Deliverance of Discipleship, Part 2

Luke 9:23

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross daily." He must take up his cross daily. Verse 1 refers to the nature of Christian discipleship. This is about the extent of Christian discipleship. To what degree? To what extent? To the extent of the point of death, even if it means the most horrible death ever imagined by the depraved human mind: crucifixion on a cross.

The verb, here, about carrying your cross, picking up your cross, taking up your cross, it refers to picking something up, just literally picking something up. Here, it's picking up the very implement that results in your death, the patibulum, the cross-beam of the cross. And here in the action of the verb, it's not just to pick it up or lift it on your shoulders, but it's to carry it from one place to another. So take this crossbeam today, where you are now; pick it up, put it on your shoulders and you do this daily, and you carry that to the place of your execution. That's what you do. That's what discipleship

is. That's what it is to be a Christian. If you don't live this way, you're not a Christian.

This is the extent to which you must die to self, and again, the verb is in the aorist tense. It indicates an urgent, summary action, you must do this, you must do it immediately. You must do it right now.

Okay, so let's get more clarity on this. What does specifically Jesus mean when he says, "Take up your cross daily"? Yours? Us individually? How is my cross, which differs significantly from his cross and its theological and atoning nature, how is ours similar? How do we share in the sufferings of Christ? What are we talking about? To answer that question, think through what the cross symbolized for Jesus in his death. Yes, it was the literal, physical implement used to crucify him.

But what does that cross represent as a symbol? The cross represents, very graphically, very vividly, the rejection and condemnation of the world. Both Jew and Gentile, remember? The cross represented the scorn of the Gentile world, which counts all those who are crucified as the very pinnacle of stupidity; the example of folly, the very worst of losers and rejects. The cross also represented the informed judgment of the Jewish world, the studied, considered, theological rejection, Luke

9:22, of the elders and the chief priests and the scribes. Total rejection from the intellectual elite, total rejection from the Gentile world.

Let's go a little deeper than that, what is it that led to Roman crucifixion? What is it that led to this Jewish rejection? It's the fact that Jesus denied himself. It's the fact that he rejected the world in order to fulfill the will of the father for his life. That led to his death. It was his desire, it was his decision to follow God with his life that led to his rejection by his own people; his crucifixion by the world. He is the perfect, quintessential, flawless example of doing the father's will, and what did the world say? I don't want God! Kill him! No matter how religious they seem, beloved, they can say, oh, I just love God. I just love Jesus. Listen, the more you truly love God, the more you truly love Jesus Christ, you're a dead man, because the world hates you.

Get this, Jesus was not a victim in this. So his rejection by the world, it was preceded by his prior rejection of the world. You may remember back in Luke 4 when the Spirit took Jesus to the wilderness to undergo testing by the devil. It says in Luke 4:5, "The devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." He enticed Jesus

with the world, with the glory of the world, with the power and the authority to rule it, to take it for himself.

And the devil spun the temptation this way, "To you I will give all of this authority and all of this glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will be all yours." Remember how Jesus answered? "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" He made that commitment before he ever went into the wilderness. He despised the world before he ever went into the wilderness, before he ever heard those words from Satan.

Jesus had a prior commitment; a greater loyalty had a hold of his affections. He loved the Lord his God, as it says in the Law of Moses, he loved his father, Deuteronomy 6:5, "with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his might." The glories of creation, the monuments of men, trading the finite for the infinite, are you serious? That's no bargain at all. That's a devilish trick.

Later, as Jesus made his way to the cross, he told the Pharisees, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." Then this, "No one takes it from me." No one takes it from me. I'm no victim; I

chose this. "I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down; I have authority to take it up again. This charge I've received from my father." What does that mean? Again, it means that long before the world rejected and crucified Jesus, he crucified and rejected the world. The world was dead to him. He didn't seek the world's approval. He didn't fret about its ultimate rejection and the judgment of rejection on him. The world was dead to him, and he was dead to the world.

That's the sense in which Jesus despised the shame of the cross, Hebrews 12:2. He cared more for pleasing the father than about pleasing the world because he had taken up his cross from the very outset of his ministry, that is, in the desert wilderness when he despised the ruler of this world. That led to rejection at his trial. That led to the crucifixion at his cross. Listen, in a satanically inspired world, the spirit that flows among all the sons of disobedience, some of them you and I know and love very much.

Doing the will of God can get you killed. The devil, all those who are aligned with him, all those who are allied with him, they love wickedness. They hate righteousness. So when one comes in the Spirit of say like psalm 45:7, "Loving righteousness, hating wickedness," that is someone who provokes

and receives the cruel fury of the satanically inspired world. Hebrews 1:8-9, connects that text Hebrews 45:7 to Christ, "Your throne O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of your uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom, "you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness therefore God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

Listen, enduring the scorn, the wrath, the hatred, the rejection of the world, it is so worth it! Well why? As I said, none of this for a true Christian none of this is truly sacrifice. None of this is like, oh, this is so troubling to me." No! This is rejoicing! This is joy! In Hebrews 12:2 we have the testimony of Jesus, who has gone before us. He's "the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, he's seated," right now, "at the right hand of the throne of God." We, taking up our cross, bearing our cross, we endure as well, despising the shame for the sake of joy, for the sake of God.

So what's your individual cross? What does it mean to take it up and carry it daily? Listen, the cross you bear is not your difficult marriage. That may be the context in which you bear your cross, but it is not the cross. The cross you bear is not your weight problem, not your health issues, it's not your

unreasonable boss, it's not your disability, or whatever. Your cross is not circumstantial; it's not situational. So what is the cross you're to bear daily as a Christian? As you pursue the will of God every day, you entrust yourself to the good providence and kindness of God, and by walking according to the will of God, doing what he wants because you love him, it may raise the ire, and it will raise the ire, of the world around you. But you go on anyway, despising the shame, caring nothing for the rejection. You continue to do what may result in your rejection.

What will result in that? What will result in your condemnation may result in your death; more likely, perhaps more difficultly, it's not going to result in an immediate martyrdom death. It's going to be a long, slow death, a death to self, and you're happy with that. Why? Because, like the Apostle Paul Galatians 6:14, you've learned to "boast in nothing except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." Why do you despise the world, because you know that "friendship with the world is enmity with God," James 4:4, and "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." And you don't want to be an enemy of God. You love him!

You're mindful of what the Apostle John said, warning us so clearly, do not love the world, "Do not love the world, neither the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You want to be so far from that text. "For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the father it's from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

That's you! You want to abide forever. You want to know the father. You want the father's will to be done in you. You want his goodness. You want to rejoice in his will, his perfect word and his great wisdom. So you're eager to carry your cross daily, to receive the disapprobation of the world, to embrace its rejection and condemnation because God is using that to further crucify yourself, and you're into that! A long, slow, daily march following Jesus Christ to the place of execution means a long, slow, but very happy, increasingly joyful, death to self.

"What does it mean to bear my cross daily?" It's a matter of bearing the shame and the scorn of the Christ-rejecting world. So we could put it this way: When you are silenced by unbelieving family, shunned by neighbors, maligned by coworkers, not because you, yourself, are unpleasant and self-righteous but

because you talk about God and Christ, that is bearing your cross.

When you're not invited or you're uninvited to social gatherings, like birthday, retirement parties, neighborhood barbecues, after-work outings, not because you're socially awkward and lack social grace, but because you refuse to participate in gossip, laugh at lewd or coarse joking or share in worldly chatter out of your love and worship of Christ, that is bearing your cross. When you're passively passed over, forgotten and ignored, when you're treated with cold indifference as an irrelevant oddity, or when you're actively despised and hated because you humbly but boldly stand upon Christian principles; that is to say, when you speak up for the dignity of all human life, even those not yet born, those who are physically or mentally disabled, those who are elderly or diseased or infirmed.

When you speak out about God's design for human sexuality, and in the most unpopular places, insisting upon a gender binary in our God-given biology, insisting upon the complementary partnership that exists in marriage, which is the union of one man with one woman for life; when you insist upon and live according to God's design for men and women, created in God's

image, therefore co-equal image bearers and yet created for different roles in the home and in the church, and all that speaking and insisting and protesting is not out of a self-righteous morality, but out of a love for God and his truth, out of a love of living by his revealed wisdom, out of a desire to glorify God and his ways, that is bearing your cross.

You get the idea, right? Our Lord's death by crucifixion allows us to see what it means to up our own crosses daily. It's living in the fear of the Lord and not in the fear of man. It's living to please the Lord even, and especially, and it will happen, at the risk of the wrath and the rejection of the world. God has designed our crosses, each one of our crosses.

He's designed our, daily, daily burdens by his loving providence. He is an all-good, all-wise God, and that is why Jesus wants us to be delivered from self and delivered from the world in order that we might really live for him. So by calling us to discipleship, our Lord has lovingly, compassionately, generously delivered us from the tyranny of the flesh and from pursuing the approval of a God-hating world.

Which leads us to a third deliverance of discipleship. He delivers us from the tyranny of Satan. Delivers us from the ruler of this world by binding us to himself, a new Lord, a new

and loving Master. So, deliverance number 3: You must obey your new Lord. You must obey your new Lord. Jesus said, If anyone wants to come after me, let him follow me. He must follow me. So we've talked about the nature of discipleship, the extent of discipleship, this is the purpose of discipleship. This is the purpose. It starts with self-denial even to the point of death for the purpose of delivering us from enslavement to sin, to death, to the devil himself, in order that we might walk in life-long, joyful obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord, and for all of eternity. But it starts now.

That's what Jesus' self-denial and Jesus' cross-bearing meant for us, deliverance from the cruel tyranny of Satan. Hebrews 2:14-15, Jesus incarnated, he took on flesh and blood like us that he might suffer and die in that flesh, that human flesh. Why? That "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long slavery." To deliver us. That, folks, is what it means to truly live.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." What's abundant life? What is abundant, joyful life? It's to live in obedience to Christ's commands. It's to follow his example. It's to live as he lived. It's to be free

from the cruel tyranny of the devil, free from the fear of death in order to walk in a new way of life, to walk in freedom and fullness of the father's love for us and our love for the father.

Think about the times that you've stumbled into sin, or you've squandered hours that you know you could have been spending with a much more profitable spiritual exercise. Do you long to do it again when you come to that realization? No. You hate those things. You want more than anything to live a consistent Christian life. Why? Just to spare yourself from the trouble of a condemning conscience? I mean, yes, that's part of it. We don't like being condemned by our conscience.

But it's not just that internal shame, feeling ashamed before God. It's not that. It's that that falling and that squandering and that waste, it kept us from what we truly love and treasure: God. It kept us from knowing him. It kept us from rejoicing in him. It kept us from the, the study and the rich treasure of his Word. It kept us from being his hands and his feet in serving other people. It kept us from what we really, truly delight in. And if you don't truly delight in God and in loving his people, you may check yourself to say, am I really a Christian?

Was there ever a happier, more joyful, more contented, more fulfilled human being than Jesus Christ? No. Perhaps we should study him. Perhaps we should see how he did it. Perhaps we should live as he lived, walk as he walked. Perhaps we should live in daily obedience to the father's will, again, I've got to repeat this, not to gain the father's approval. That's Pharisaism; that's legalism; that is another cruel tyranny. That's running from one ditch and falling off a cliff. Not to gain the father's approval because we already have it through Jesus' perfection. Perhaps we should die to self, take up our cross daily, and follow him, as a result of his approval. Because what did he save us for? For him. To know him, to love him.

Just prior to enduring the suffering of the cross, the betrayal unto death, the trial by the Sanhedrin, the mockery of kings and soldiers, and then being delivered over to death by Pontius Pilate, just prior to bearing the weight of divine wrath, just prior to absorbing the hatred of God for everything that offends his holiness, Jesus prayed this prayer, "Father, the hour has come. The time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only

true God, Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”

Jesus walked in full, perfect obedience to the father. He accomplished all the work the father gave him to do. Because he walked in obedience, the father was glorified. God’s people were saved from their sins, and through faith in Jesus Christ, eternal life from God himself pours forth from God by the Spirit to everyone who believes and follows Christ as Lord. That’s the result of his obedience.

It’s profound, eternally meaningful, when we follow him. There’s no discipleship without Lordship. There’s no experience of life eternal apart from walking in obedience in the now, knowing the joy of walking in his ways, living in accordance with his wisdom. That’s why it has been rightly said, “If he’s not Lord of all in your life, then he’s not Lord at all in your life.” Christ must have his way with your life, with every single step you take, with every word you speak, with every thought you think.

Is Jesus Lord of your bank account? Is he Lord of your daily schedule? Is he Lord of your appointments, your commitments? Is he Lord of your interpersonal communication? Is

he truly Lord of your business and your work? Is he truly Lord in your marriage? Is he truly Lord for you, child, with your parents, or your grandparents. Is he truly Lord of you, parents and grandparents, with your time, that you give it to others? Is Jesus Lord of your priorities, your ambitions? Is he Lord of your imaginations? Is he Lord of your affections and your reactions? Does he have your allegiance, or does he only have your allegiance when you're getting what you want? Will you only follow him if it means you get what you want, you get what you think will get you out of the trouble you're in? Then you'll follow him?

Listen, that's the prosperity gospel right there. That's the prosperity gospel! Sow a seed of faith, money, and you hit the slot machine and hope you get a big payoff. Don't we live the same way sometimes? Does he have your loyalty when you feel set aside, when you feel you've been slighted or offended? If Christ commands you to be baptized, will you do it? If he commands you to join the local church and submit to its leadership and to its authority, will you do it?

If he commands you to order your life in such a way that you can practically and meaningfully obey the one-another commands of the New Testament, will you do that? I mean, does he

have to stand before you in flesh and blood, like come down, say, say, set aside my greater work in the world, come down from the throne where I'm at my Father's side, interceding for you and for all of you around the world, and all times, do I need to step off that throne, come and pay you a personal visit so that you'll take me seriously? Or can I just write it, here, in the Word, at the cost of martyrs, at the cost of blood? Will you listen to it, here? Will you listen to it if a loving Christian says it to you?

If Christ commands you to evangelize, to know the Gospel well enough that you can explain it to somebody else and not have to defer to others all the time; you can actually explain it to other people, will you obey his command to take the Gospel to unbelievers? Isn't this a joy to us? Yes, it's a joy! If he commands you to make disciples in the church, to use your time and your efforts and your energies to invest into other people and teach other Christians to obey all his commands, will you do that?

Listen, that's what it means to follow him. It's not to play church. It's not to inhabit a pew for a few hours. You can understand why I say that this is a paradigm-shifting text. It demands your all.



At the very end of this road is Christ, my Savior, God, my eternal reward. At the end of this road is the never-ending joy of knowing him and learning his ways and marveling at his wisdom and discovering his wonders and rejoicing in his full and complete salvation. We get to do that eternally, and you know what? If you're with me, we do this together! Amen?