

GREAT CHRISTIANS ACCEPT THE CROSS

Luke 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

So, what does it mean to “take up our cross daily”? So many Christians relate it to that old song... “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen”. They see the cross as a burden they are forced to wear. They see the movies of Christ carrying His cross, bent over struggling and believe that is what it means to bear their cross daily. We hear the term “he has his cross to bear”.

In effect, people see the bearing the cross as a burden and even defeat. This is promoted by many pulpits. Messages about how “that should have been me on that cross”. That we put Christ on the cross so we should be the ones being crucified. Is it no wonder Christians don’t want to get into the battle? They feel as if they are defeated before the battle begins.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The cross was used as an instrument of death. The word cross is taken from the Greek ‘stauros’. An instrument of capital punishment. Figuratively; exposure to death, i.e. self denial. Under Roman law, the condemned were required to carry their own cross member to show others that they are headed toward their death. Hollywood has done a great job diluting the truth. The condemned did not drag the entire cross up the hill as depicted by Jim Ceveniel in the Passion of the Christ. The crossbar (known as the patibulum) weighed up to 150 pounds and the upright (known as the stipes) weighed up to 300 pounds. The condemned were flogged and then their hands were nailed or tied to the patibulum. Then when they reached the place of crucifixion that patibulum was hoisted up with the prisoner on it and attached to the stipes. We see Catholics in countries like the Philippines dragging a cross for miles to show their burdens. None of this is farther from what it means to “take up our cross”.

Christ carried his cross not to show his death, but to show the denial of his life, that we might live. In effect, his was a walk victorious. Without Christ willingly taking up his cross, there would be no victory over sin and the grave. Christ shed blood was the atonement for our sins once and for all.

When we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily we are saying that we will be willing to crucify the old man for Christ’s sake and live victoriously for Him. But the key word here is WILLING. Dying to self and living for Christ should be the least we can do. We can never repay Christ for his sacrifice, but we can follow His example. The difference here, is that we have to die daily to our old selves whereas Christ need die only once for all.

Just as Christ had to prepare himself to bear the cross, and had to endure the consequences, so must we.

1. It started with prayer, as it always should. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed so intensely it was as if he sweat drops of blood. **Luke 22:44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.** Why was he having to “pray more earnestly”? Look at vs 42...
2. There will be internal conflict. Christ in his humanity struggled with this decision he had to make. **Luke 22:41-42 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not**

my will, but thine, be done. I believe there was a very large pause between “remove this cup from me” and ... “nevertheless”. Note the punctuation used. A full colon. A solid pause. Not a comma, not even a semi-colon. Not a period, thank goodness. But a full pause. We will struggle with old habits, fleshly desires and past sins as we decide to crucify the old man every day. We will find all kinds of excuses to not crucify our old man.... But .. our final response must be “nevertheless, not my will but thine be done”. It is God’s will for every Christian to bear the cross and follow Jesus. And .. you know what...We cannot truly follow Jesus if we do not take up our cross. **Matthew 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.** In my back home English.... It ain’t an option folks. God expects it of us. We are to take that cross, identify with our Lord and Saviour and follow Him with as a living sacrifice **(Romans 12:1-2) 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. 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.** It is God’s will that we present ourselves a living sacrifice.

3. There will be betrayal and opposition. **Luke 22:47 And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.** When we make a decision to wholly follow Christ daily, people who we thought were our friends will turn on us and we will face opposition. It must be expected and dealt with.
4. There will be false accusations. Christ went before an illegal council and had false witnesses brought against him. **Matthew 26:59-60 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, ,**We should expect no less.
5. People closest to us can disappoint us. Peter denied Christ three times. **Luke 22:61-62 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.**
6. It can seem as if the whole world is turning against us. **Matthew 27:23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.** As those cries “crucify Him, crucify Him” echoed in the ears of our Lord, it must have seemed that way.
7. We will be mocked. The people and soldiers mocked our Lord. **And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!**
8. There will be pain. Certainly not on the level as our Lord endured, but we will face challenges as we make the necessary changes in our lives.
9. At times it will seem like we are totally alone in our battle. Jesus had to face the cross alone. Even his Father in heaven was not going to intercede, in fact had to turn his back on his only Son for he could not look upon sin. **Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** Jesus had to face this alone. He could have called thousands of angels to get him off the cross. When Peter cut off the servant’s ear in the garden Jesus said: **Matthew 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?** Jesus could have asked for help, but then he would not have been the perfect sacrifice. We, too must decide to take up our cross and bear it. It is one of those few things that we must decide to do...on our own.
10. There will be a cost. Christ gave his life that we might live. We must be willing to give our old life for Christ that others might live. This means doing things like crucifying our fear of witnessing to the lost. Christ gave his life that we might live. The least we can do is tell the world.

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11. There will be a death. Paul set's the example in the book of Galatians. **Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.**
12. Through death comes victory. When Christ died, the veil of the temple was rent in two and we now have access to the Father. **1 Corinthians 15:54-58 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. When we accept Christ as our Saviour, our sins are swallowed up in the victory of the cross. Death, or sin, has no more control over us and we should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. We can't walk in newness of life unless we truly bury the old life. Baptism isn't simply a "step" in our Christian life, but a commitment to walk in newness of life.**
13. There will be rewards. **Matthew 25:23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**

You want to take your Christian walk to the next level? You must take this step of obedience. You must take up your cross DAILY and follow Christ. You can't just 'try it out' for a day or two. Christ didn't "try out" the cross. **Isaiah 50:7 For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.** Flint was used to make the sharpest of knives and described the greatest of rocks (like Christ) The expressions, where the word is used, means that the "Messiah would be firm and resolute (rock solid) amidst all contempt and scorn which he would meet; that he had made up his mind to endure it, and would not shrink from any kind or degree of suffering which would be necessary to accomplish the great work in which he was engaged."

Are we ready to set our face like a flint? To make up our mind to endure it and not shrink from any kind of degree of suffering which would be necessary to accomplish the great work in which we are today engaged?

Cookie did a good job with the Tiaras. A symbol to remind the ladies that they are princesses and therefore should live as such. I took that example and asked Cookie to help me with a reminder about taking up the cross daily. She made these bookmarks. If you are ready to take this step, I will ask you to come forward during the invitation and take a bookmark. Are we ready to crucify bad habits? Are we ready to crucify ungodly thinking? Are we ready to crucify that one sin in our life that we hang on to? If so, take one of these bookmarks as a symbol of your decision to bear your cross daily, and live a renewed life for Christ.

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Are you ready?