

# My Cross

Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:33-37;  
Luke 9:23-25; 14:27; 15:25-32; Romans 6:1-11;  
Galatians 2:20, 21; 6:14; Philippians 1:21

“*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matthew 10:38).

Jesus had His cross; I have mine. It is easy to promote His; it is also easy to neglect mine. If I do not accept mine, I cannot possess His. Unless I take up my cross, His is in vain as far as my life is concerned. I may not be able to change the world, but God can change me. No one can walk the path of righteousness for me. I must sacrifice the “Big Me” to receive the “Great He.” The absolute good in me is Christ in me (Galatians 2:20, 21). On the cross Jesus died not only instead of us, but also for us.

We, too, die, suffer, and carry our crosses. He bore His; we also must bear ours. We have the gift of grace, but we also must have the grit of good works. Grace is not earned, but it demands our efforts. Salvation can never be “Come in, Savior, but stay out, Lord.” Martin Luther King, Jr., well said, “The cross we bear precedes the crown we wear” (Martin Luther King, Jr., “Challenge to the Churches and Synagogues,” *Challenge to Religion*, ed. Mathew Ahmann (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1963), 168.). A cross around your neck can never substitute for a cross on your back.

There is no “cheap grace,” and there are no cheap crosses. It is easy to be tolerant, but it is costly to practice true Christian love.

## Reread—Think—Meditate—Act

Let us keep going back to the text: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23; see also Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34). Few Scriptures are known better or quoted more often than this one. Look at it carefully. Does it say what we make it say? Few Scriptures are more misunderstood and misused than this one. What does it mean to take up my cross daily?

(1) *Exclusive*. This could be one of the most demanding statements Jesus made. His condition is dogmatic, intolerant, rigid, basic, terse, mandatory, and eternally vital. Jesus said you are either “in” or “out.” He gave no “ifs, ands, or buts.” He said, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). He said, “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33). The cross calls for death. We must die to self, sin, and society. Crosses are costly. Basically, we have only three problems: “me, myself, and I.” We must die to all three! Superficial views of the cross result in weak Christians. We cannot compromise the cross. The Christian life is not always easy and happy. Will we pay the price? Will we die to ourselves? Will we give up our rights to ourselves? Jesus is Lord. What do we need to do? We need to admit to being lost sinners and put our obedient faith in Jesus. No one but sinners can apply.

We know we need to believe in God. We also need to know that God believes in us. The power to live the Epistles is found in the story of the cross in the Gospels. We are pardoned—not paroled. We do not live like convicts. Only men who have been saved from sin can bring others to Christ. We must never forget that God lives in us “to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Christians must become vessels of honor (2 Timothy 2:20, 21). All of us must develop and maintain our own individual relationships with God. We cannot afford to live in doubt and visit our faith. We must live in faith and abandon our doubt.

(2) *Daily*. “*Ouch!*” *Daily? Christianity is a life—not a moment*. Paul tersely said, “. . . I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). Life is daily—so is Christianity. We need daily bread (Matthew 6:11) and daily spiritual bread (Acts 17:11; Hebrews 3:13). The early church had daily additions (Acts 2:47;

16:5). We do not die once and stay dead. Daily death is a daily choice. We are to be Christians who are daily living a crucified life with Christ. As Christians, we . . .

- . . . are facing only one direction.
- . . . can never turn back.
- . . . no longer have plans of our own.
- . . . have minds through which Christ thinks.
- . . . have hearts through which Christ loves.
- . . . have voices through which Christ speaks.
- . . . have bodies through which Christ serves.

Carry your cross until you find someone who needs it more than you do—then give it to him. (You never will.)

(3) *My cross is not one of my many burdens.* Too many think, “This burden must be my cross to bear.” Jesus said “cross,” not “crosses.” A cross is something we “take up,” not something we “put up with.” This kind of thinking reduces Christians to victims. Galatians 2:20, 21 is the most “self-filled” text in the Scriptures; it is also the most “self-surrendered” text in the Scriptures. Eight personal pronouns are used in the passage. “I” appears five times; “me” appears three. What is the great paradox? Self-crucifixion allows true life. One can neither kill nor hurt a dead man. Some of us are not totally dead. The man who has died to everything has the ability to give up anything. The Christian has to die before he can serve. The alabaster box has to be broken (see Mark 14:3).

(4) *My cross is not misery or sadistic martyrdom. My cross represents joy, not pessimistic “doom and gloom”* (see John 15:11–14; Romans 14:17; 15:13; Hebrews 12:2; James 1:2; 1 John 1:4; 3 John 4). Tragically, we know about guilt, but we do not know about grace and gratitude. Do not teach self-sacrifice without joy. Do not reduce the gospel to stoicism. Taking up the cross is positive, not negative; it is joyous, not miserable. It results in victorious living, not neurotic martyrdom. We are called to live in the “forgiveness of God.”

(5) *A sinner, in order to receive salvation, must die to himself and take up his cross daily.* These are two separate actions, not one. Do not confuse “self-denial” with “cross-bearing.” What, then, is cross-bearing? It is accepting forgiveness and sharing salvation with others. We need fresh forgiveness daily. Yesterday’s forgiveness is not for today or tomorrow. To take up my cross is to live forgiven, to forgive others, and to die (like Jesus) so that others may live. We cannot receive what we refuse to give. Until one accepts grace, he cannot learn mercy. The cross is our call to forgive others. Each of us must write a book on the cross. I have written mine; now write yours!

*The cross . . .  
there is no other way!*