

His Cross and Mine

Introduction

The Text

¹⁸ Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹ And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” ²⁰ Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:18–27)

His Cross & My Cross

A. I began pastoring and preaching back in San Luis Obispo in the fall of 2006. I was the college pastor at my church there for five years. And somewhere over the course of my time there, I began to identify two master-themes that had really come to define my message and ministry—two things I kept coming back to again and again because I saw them everywhere in the Scriptures and felt they held the key to the Christian life.

1. And now, to my delight, we come to a text this morning where these two master-themes appear side by side. And I just get the privilege of bringing this out for us.

- a. Master-theme #1: His cross. Master-theme #2: My cross. The cross that He bears for me, and the cross that I bear for Him.

B. Let me elaborate on this just a bit even here at the start . . .

(1) His Cross

A. Our text begins (vv. 18-22), as we have seen, with Jesus revealing clearly for the first time to His disciples that the Christ must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised.

1. Jesus must go to the cross. This is fundamental. This is everything to us. Whatever else we have to say about the Bible or Christianity or God is meaningless if we falter at this point.

- a. The cross is the crux of our faith. It is the means, the only means, whereby sinful man is reconciled to a holy God. It is the answer to the cosmic dilemma. Everything hangs on the cross of Christ.
- B. This is what makes what's come to be known as liberal "Christianity" so reprehensible. It removes the mystery of the atonement and distills Christianity into a mere set of helpful principles by which anyone can order their lives. "Jesus has some good things to teach us, but we don't need anyone to die for us, thank you."
- 1. When a theologian, or a church, or denomination moves in such a direction they move away from Christianity altogether. There is no Christianity without the cross of Christ.
- C. That's master-theme #1. Now master-theme #2 . . .

(2) My Cross

- A. But, and here is the essential point for us this morning, His cross is of no value to us if we are not ready and willing to pick up our own cross and follow after Him.
- 1. In the latter part of our text ([vv. 23-27](#)), Jesus draws a hard line (indeed, harder than we would like) from His cross to our own—from the cross He will bear for the sins of the world to the one we will bear if we truly want to associate ourselves with Him.
- B. This is what makes things like the prosperity gospel so reprehensible—the lie being promoted from pulpits all over the world now that says: "Jesus suffered so you don't have to. He's ready to give you health, wealth, prosperity here and now. All you need is the faith to shake that treasure from His pockets and its yours."
- 1. This kind of theology can't make any sense of the text we are about to give ourselves to this morning. Brothers/sisters, any version of "Christianity" that conveniently edits out of their message the part about taking up your own cross, is not biblical Christianity any longer.

Two Cross and Two Poles

- A. So, if I could put it somewhat scandalously: When Jesus attempts to present the gospel to people, He talks not merely about one cross, but two. His cross. My cross. These are the two poles of the Christian life. Everything else turns on the axis they establish.
- B. So things are going to get real in here this morning. Focusing in particular on [vv. 23-27](#), I just want to look at two things: (1) The Calculus; and (2) The Christian Life.

(1) The Calculus

- A. Under this heading, we're just going to push into our text verse by verse and, by the end, I trust you'll come to understand what I mean by "The Calculus".

Do You Want to Be A Christian?

A. We begin there in v. 23a: “And he said to all . . .”

1. So the first thing to note is that this is for you. He’s not merely speaking to the twelve here, to the apostles. He is speaking to any who would listen. He is speaking to you.

B. And He goes on to say: “If anyone would come after me . . .” (v. 23b).

1. The basic question that confronts us here is this: “Do you want to come after Me?” Which, as we see in [Luke 14:27](#), is just another way of asking: “Do you want to be My disciple?” Or, we could put it even more pointedly: “Do you want to be a Christian?”
 - a. Now, I assume that if you are here this morning, either your mom/spouse/friend dragged you, and you would quickly answer “No” to this question; or, and this is probably the case for most of us, you would answer with a resounding “Yes! Yes, I want to be a Christian. Yes, I want to be a disciple. Yes, I want to come after you Jesus!”

Take Up Your Cross

A. To which Jesus would respond: “Okay, let me tell you what you have to do . . .” “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

1. In many ways, it’s a devastating thought. “I was under the impression that Christianity is all about what I’m going to get from Him. Now you’re saying it’s going to cost me?”

- a. Yes! While certainly on the one hand Christianity is about the free gift of God’s grace, on the other hand, we see that to receive that grace you have to let go of everything else.

B. Let me just fasten onto this idea of taking up our cross, since it carries within it the sense of denying self, and really just puts a vivid picture on it for us.

1. The cross has become so central to our understanding of Christianity, so familiar to us through the years, that perhaps even when we ourselves are told we must pick it up, we don’t sense the absolute terror of such an idea.

C. John Stott, in his masterful book [The Cross of Christ](#), writes that there was a “horror with which . . . crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world. . . . Crucifixion seems to have been invented by ‘barbarians’ on the edge of the known world and taken over from them by both Greeks and Romans. It is probably the most cruel method of execution ever practiced, for it deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been inflicted. The victim could suffer for days before dying. When the Romans adopted it, they reserved it for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery, provided that they were also slaves, foreigners or other nonpersons. . . . Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion, except in extreme cases of treason. Cicero in one of his speeches condemned it as . . . ‘a most cruel and disgusting punishment’” (pp. 29-30). And it’s with this

context in the background that Jesus says to His disciples: “If you really want to be a Christian, take up your cross!”

1. One commentator on this writes: “The disciples had probably seen a man take up his cross, and they knew what it meant. When a man from one of their villages took up a cross and went off with a little band of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He would not be back” (TNTC).

a. So, needless to say, this was a rough day for the disciples. Not only did they find out they were following a crucified Christ. They also had the news broken to them that they must be a crucified people. And so too is it for us!

D. But Jesus goes on. These things are fleshed out further in the verses that follow.

1. In v. 24 we see that we are “los[ing] [our] lives” for His sake.

2. In v. 26 we see that we are going to suffer shame because of our association with Him. Guilty by association. Remember John 15:18: “¹⁸ If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

a. If we are going to associate ourselves with Christ, we are going to be shamed, hated, rejected by the world.

E. One of the speakers at The Gospel Coalition Conference yesterday was an Iranian, saved out of Islam. But when he was contemplating coming to Christ, his dad told him: “If you go with Jesus, you lose a father. You aren’t my boy.”

1. But this guy denied himself, took up his cross, and followed Jesus. He lost his life for Jesus’ sake and suffered shame for His name.

a. What would you do?

A Counterintuitive Calculus

A. Now, it’s in the midst of all this, that this calculus I’m talking about starts to come into view. There is an equation here in Jesus’ words.

B. If I only read to you from this first side of the equation and then stopped, you would think God is cruel and abusive, like some kind of cosmic slave-driver.

1. But there is another side to the equation. And it’s this side that makes all the difference. It’s this side that leads us to the conclusion that, at the end of the day, the Christian life is not so much about what we are giving up as much as it is about what we are gaining: namely, Jesus.

C. Do you see it? This glorious fact is tucked into nearly every verse of our text.

1. In v. 23: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
 - a. In other words: “You deny yourself, you take up your cross and you get Me! I don’t leave you empty-handed. I give you Myself!”
 2. Or in v. 24b: “[W]hoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”
 - a. In other words: “I’m not trying to kill you in this, I’m trying to save you! If you turn away from yourself and the false gods and false gospels of this world, and you put your life into My hands, it’s not ultimately death, it’s life!”
 3. In v. 25 we see that Jesus is ultimately concerned with what will profit us: “For what does it profit a man . . .”
 - a. In other words: “I know the call to take up your cross seems like an unbearably high price to pay, but I am calling you to this for your profit!”
 4. And then, in vv. 26-27, the implicit message is that following Jesus, while it will invite shame and scorn from the world, it will end with you receiving honor and glory in the presence of almighty God!
 - a. This is why the Apostles, after being imprisoned by their own kinsmen, beaten for their preaching of the gospel, and finally released—we read in Acts 5:41 that they went away “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer [shame] for the name.” They got it. They got the calculus. They ran the equation.
- D. They understood that Christianity is not so much about denying ourselves as much as it is about indulging in Christ; not so much about losing our lives as much as it is about saving our lives in Christ; not so much about the great cost of following Jesus as much as it is about the great profit we gain in Him; not so much about the shame we receive from the world as much as it is about the glory we receive from God!
1. Are we letting go of things? Yes. Is it hard? Yes. Is taking up our cross easy? No. Is it worth it to know Christ—the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings? Yes!
- E. We have a beautiful picture of this sort of thing in the Olympics do we not? Are you guys watching the Olympics these days? Is my house the only one where in the evening we’re moving furniture, putting on thick socks, and slipping around on the wood floor to music, doing triple sow-cows or whatever? We love it.
1. But let me ask you something: How do these guys and gals get the gold? Does it not require a thousand denials along the way. They’re giving up junk food. They’re giving up sleeping in. They’re giving up time with friends. They’re giving up weekends. They’re giving up a thousand things . . . so that they can get the gold.

- a. Don't you see? They give up lesser pleasures so that they might enjoy an even greater one. And that's really what Jesus is calling us to here. "Take up your cross . . . and you get Me!"

Running in Reverse

- A. But Jesus knows there's another way to run this equation. Natural man gets all this terribly backwards. His approach is really summed up for us there in v. 25b: ". . . he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself."
 1. "I don't want self-denial. I don't want to lose my life for Christ. I certainly don't want to pick up my cross. I'm not interested in God. I don't care about eternity. I'm not worried about the forgiveness of sins. I want the world."
- B. Does that not sound like the slogan of Silicon Valley to you? And so many Christians are getting swept up in this nonsense: "Let me climb the ladder, let me get the accolades, let me buy the stuff—he who has the most toys wins."
 1. To which God would respond: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? You've laid up all this treasure for yourself but you are not rich toward Me!" (Luke 12:20-21).
- C. And Jesus is here saying: "So what's it going to be?" "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (v. 23).

(2) The Christian Life

- A. Now we've seen The Calculus. As we draw things to a close, let's talk about The Christian Life . . .

The Starting Point

- A. Jesus knows that if we're ever even going to really start this thing, we can't just talk about His cross, as glorious as it is. We have to talk about our own.
- B. Now, perhaps you've misunderstood me up to this point. Let me clarify.
 1. I am not saying that the cross we pick up is somehow equal to Christ's.
 2. I am not saying that we are somehow saved by our own works—that through our own acts of self-denial we atone for our own sins.
 3. I am saying that until we are ready and willing to take up our own cross we have no reason to think we shall receive the benefits procured by His cross. The act of taking up my cross to follow Him is simply an expression of my full-hearted embrace of Jesus as my Savior, Lord, and Treasure.
 - a. It communicates both that I know how desperate a state I am in because of my sin and that I believe He is my only hope for rescue. I'd let the world go to lay hold of Him. And if you don't have that, you don't have Him.

C. That's the point. That's why immediately following Jesus' discussion of His own cross, He turns to speak of the cross His disciples must bear.

1. If we don't pick up our own cross in embrace of His we can't even start the Christian life.

The Daily Embrace

A. But it also seems, according to Jesus, that this is a "daily" thing. It's not one-and-done, it's every morning on my knees: "Take the world but give me Jesus!" "...let him deny himself and take up his cross daily..." (v. 23).

1. In other words the Christian life doesn't just start here it continues in this interplay between Christ's cross and our own. That's why I said at the beginning that these are the two poles of the Christian life—that everything else turns on the axis they establish.

B. Let me explain. Every sin you ever commit is a lapse of faith in His cross and a consequent shrugging off of your own.

1. And, conversely, every good fruit, you ever bear is the outworking of your faith in His cross and your consequent taking up of your own.

C. I'll just give you a couple examples to chew on.

1. For the guy or girl that struggles with pornography. When you lose sight of the cross of Christ—the glory, the beauty, the riches of your inheritance in Him, the wonder of His love—well, then the things of this world seem so much more enticing. So when that temptation comes you shrug off your own cross and go after what you want in the moment.

a. But if God gives me eyes to see all that Christ is for me at the cross, suddenly flesh and fleeting pleasure seems almost silly. "Why would I trade God for this?" So trusting in His cross you take up your own and die to the website or the magazine.

2. I think we all struggle in one way or another with the fear of man. The concern for the opinions of others. What do they think of me? How can I get them to accept me, praise me? If we lose sight of the cross of Christ and the love of the Father we have in Him by grace, then suddenly getting other people to like and love us seems so much more important. We're willing to sell out on some of our convictions or we just live these horribly anxious lives. Because we can't please everyone. We shrug off our own cross and start caring way too much about the world.

a. But if at the cross of Christ I have the sure word of the Father spoken over me—that I am accepted that I am loved that I don't need to be more before He will love me because Jesus was enough for me—then I can pick up my own cross and die to the opinions of man. What they say or think of me doesn't define me anymore. I'm free.

- D. I could keep going but I'll just leave it there. Let me leave you with this: Today in our text, Jesus speaks a hard word—"Take up your cross daily and follow Me"—but He says it with such a tender heart. He loves you. He knows the stuff of this world will leave you broken and bankrupt in the end. And He's inviting you into eternal life and the enjoyment of Him. Would you take up your cross today and follow after Him?!