

“Carrying my Cross”

–Easter 2021

Luke 9:18-26

**by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
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Luke 9:18 - *And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again." 20 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." 21 And He strictly warned 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 be raised the third day." 23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? 26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.*

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Jesus knew what was coming. He knew how it would end. He was doing what we all should do in such times of spiritual war: *He was praying*. It's an interesting fact that Jesus felt it necessary to pray in such times and yet we most often think we can go without it.

Generally we pray when we finally feel there is nothing we can do to affect the desired outcome. With that said, then why would *Jesus* pray? After all, He was and is deity! Matthew 26:53 says that Jesus could have called "12 legions" ...more than 72,000 angels, to come to His rescue, which is significant when one notes that in 2 Kings 19:35 one angel killed 185,000 soldiers in one night! It seems to me that Jesus held all the cards and could have unilaterally moved to "fix the situation" had He desired to do so. Yet even though He had the *power* to do so, He still chose to place it all ...*the whole of His destiny*, in the hands of His Father, and He seemed to desire to be an example to all of us in this matter also. That too is a rarity, as most of us talk the talk but still allow ourselves to be the exception to the rule.

He disciples were still physically with Him at this point. They had survived the "heat" and had remained diligent; they were "still standing." We all know the premise that when the going gets tough, when the battle

gets intense, that it is then we find out what we really are made of. Anyone can carry on when the way is clear and safe, and our uniforms are clean and pressed. It is during the heat of the battle, when things get messy...it's in the fight that we find out what we are made of. It is during those times that, as a pastor, I discover just who is really on board...who can be counted on and who has my back.

It is in those times...the hard times, that many will seek to move on to more pleasant and less dangerous venues. Some will tire of the routine...the conflict and the service, and will drift off away from the front. If Covid taught us anything, it taught us that fact quite clearly. Covid didn't *make* folks selfish and worldly, it just pulled back the curtain to expose them for what they truly were. In that, I am forever thankful for this pandemic. But there are always those who will not only meet the challenge but moreover will step up and bring it on...all with the understanding that victory is near and that they are exactly where they are supposed to be...right where they are called to be. In the quiet of those private moments they will tell you that they were *born for this*...

Jesus asked His boys what the people were saying concerning Him. Please note that He was not interested in what the kings and rulers thought of Him, nor did He care about the opinion of the church down the street. He was asking what the *people* thought, those who were lost and seeking, those he was trying to reach.

Their voices echoed those of the masses today. Some said Jesus was a prophet, some a "good teacher." But Jesus was, and is, looking for something more from us. Ultimately, it is not so much about public opinion...the "group think" of the day, but rather where each individual stands. Jesus asked the apostles the most important question of their lives, the most important question of *our* lives, and that of all mankind:

"Who do you say that I am?"

It is clear that Peter's answer was based not so much on something he was *told*, but rather what he had *personally witnessed and experienced*. It was "gnosko" (GR) knowledge: "*knowledge through experience*." Peter answered correctly, "*You are the Messiah, the son of God.*" Such an answer was more than just a political position...more than a mental ascent. It was, and must be, an absolute surety of the soul. Yet Jesus would...against all conventional wisdom and social protocols, ask for even *more* of Peter...from all of them...more even from *us*...despite what the tide of public opinion will tolerate.

Jesus was going to ask these guys...and *ask us who desire to follow Him today*, to not just receive His offer of salvation but to even surrender their very lives...the control and daily living, to Him as *Lord over them*. He would be asking them to essentially die *with* him. To "pick up their *own* cross" and carry it every day. To carry in them...deep in their soul and yet fully manifest to public view, the fact that they...*that we*, have died to ourselves, to this world and all of its selfish pursuits. Both then and now, such a premise is anything but embraced by the majority! Indeed salvation is a free gift, but discipleship will cost you everything. Deitrich Bonhoeffer once said "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*"

This issue has to be more than a **confession**. For ultimately, we answer His request with our lives, not our mouths...

21 And He strictly warned 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 be raised the third day."

One would naturally question the Lord's directive here. Why would He ask that no one tell anyone of this awesome truth?

Firstly, we need to know that timing is ever so important in all issues of kingdom operations. People can reject Christ adamantly and repeatedly until the moment the Father has so designed. Secondly, the people may have

been looking for a Messiah, but they were forever looking for one who would manifest such in the form of an *earthly* king ... a political liberator... a social figure of the likes of Gandhi. Jesus, *would not be that guy*. Man is still looking for that person, and one day he will indeed appear. We will know that individual as the anti-christ, and he will give the people what they want.

Faith in that day played out much like our own age in that mankind was looking to religion as a vehicle for experience, comfort and material gratification. Yet this stance is one that has been created through the desires of mankind. To stand against such is not some fringe doctrine or simply a belief of our church. This involves literally who He himself said He was and who He said He wasn't. Unless we grasp this truth... the truth of who He is, what He came for, and what he wants of us, we are apt to embrace a pseudo-Messiah of man's own invention. We genuinely want to be saved, but usually only from discomfort, hardship, and self-discipline!

At this point, Jesus chooses to give them the bottom line: this is the salvation I have come to offer; "I intend to suffer, be rejected, and finally killed. And then, I will return to life again. By doing all of this, I can pay for all of your debt of sin, and the debt of all mankind. This is the plan, this is the path of redemption. But it does not end there... for I am asking you to join me in this act. I'm asking you to step into the fray... to suffer, to be rejected by the world, and to die to it and to your flesh. Then you will... in this rebirth redemption, return to life, *real life*, and thus come to know what you were born to be... what your destiny and calling is."

Just who this morning do *you* say He is? Friend? Councilor? Caretaker? Savior? How would you define Him and your relationship with Him? Seldom does such include words like "king" and "Lord." And even when they do, most often they are merely Christian buzz-words... not life manifested realities. But make no mistake... this is the truth of the relationship that He wants with you and me.

23 He said to all, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Here is Christ's big offer and opportunity: No... this does not speak concerning *salvation*, for no one becomes a Christian by *following* Jesus as guru! Salvation comes through the cross. Redemption comes by accepting the offer of rebirth in Christ, and both acknowledging and receiving the free gift that Jesus bought for you. *This* offer... *this* call of Jesus herein is not about salvation... it is the path of the disciple. This is rather the *manifest* ... the *proof*, of the born again individual... in that he or she now naturally desires... in this new state of redeemed new birth and life, to be like Jesus, to live for Him and to further His kingdom, to be active in the battle for lost souls. To "pick up his or her own cross"... and to die daily *to* this world... and *for* our king.

This position of disciple requires no special training ... no forms to fill out... no unique talents. We are told that His offer is to anyone and everyone. Anyone who wants, anyone who will, can come to Him. The offer is not reserved for the "good" people, the "chosen" Calvinist, or any certain class or social stature. It's for everyone. The only pre-requisite to this offer is that our heart and lives must truly desire. Desire to come after Jesus!

However, if this is indeed our desire, then to acquire such a title has requirements. We must "deny ourselves." Not deny *something*, but rather literally deny our *selves*. For it is not "something" that we ultimately battle against, but literally ourselves in our natural form.

"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"
Jeremiah 17:9

"... You stubbornly follow your own evil desires and refuse to listen to me." Jeremiah 16:12

We are to “pick up our cross and carry it.” But what exactly is this cross Jesus speaks of? Certainly anyone in Christ’s day seen carrying a cross was clearly seen as a “dead man walking.” It was understood that carrying the cross was evidence that one was now in subjection to and under the control of that which he once was in rebellion. To carry our cross is to bear the weight every day of our worldly death. It is to surrender our will, desire, and plans to the destiny God has laid out for us, and to do so on a daily basis.

To be reborn is to surrender our **sin**. To be a *disciple*...to carry our cross, is to surrender our **lives**. Furthermore, it is not a single event but rather something we are to carry daily. It is not something we carry once and then thereafter set down to live in comfort and ease for the rest of our lives. To carry it daily means you will be weary and broken. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die daily.” We do all this to follow Him. There are no shortcuts and Christ offers no middle road.

But let us remember, Jesus also carried that cross and died in the flesh, and He was reborn in a far greater form than what He surrendered. That is what He promises for us too. Not just in the eternal, but in *this life*. The life we surrender...according to scripture, is given back one-hundred fold, *in this life*. Do you believe that? If so, why then do you struggle with such a surrender?

“Jesus said, “Most certainly I tell you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land, for my sake, and for the sake of the Good News, but he will receive one hundred times more now in this time: houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land, with persecutions; and in the age to come eternal life.” Mark 10:29-30

24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"

Here we have the “other side of the coin.” Such speaks to those who have understood these past few verses and have decided to stay on the sidelines. Those, attempting to keep hold of their lives, to stay “safe”, and to indulge in this world will, according to this passage, ultimately lose it all.

Sadly, I have watched this passage come to pass over and over again in so many lives, and it is heartbreaking to behold. The only thing that keeps me sane through this sad display is that I also have the joy of watching a few who have embraced their discipleship, “picked up their cross,” and our Lord is showing them a life this world could never offer.

"So therefore, whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple." Luke 14:33

The question that is posed in verse 25 is plain and obvious. Why do we try to hang on to something which we ultimately cannot hold and will eventually lose? Christ will not force us to carry that cross, but how can we say we love Him and say “no” to Him at the same time?

The world is moving so very quickly. We are seeking to accumulate as much as we can, as fast as we can. Yet the world’s dwelling masses continue to come up empty-handed and with empty hearts! It seems that as never

before humanity is so desperate to find some meaning and purpose to fill their hearts, even while possessing more material possessions than even before in history.

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

Jesus now gets very personal and intimate. For Jesus, this "grab-and-run" ...this smash and grab attitude is a heart that is ashamed to know Him. It is a blight upon the church today, seeking all the blessings of Christendom, while at the same time seeking all the world has to offer.

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon." Matthew 6:24

Note that it indeed doesn't say that if I treat my Savior this way that I will lose my salvation. But do I want to live my life only to in the end have Him be ashamed of me? How will I explain why, despite the cross, I lived for myself? How, even though He gave me life and everything I have, I have still knelt at the altar of the world? How can it be that He cleansed me from sin, and I never responded. I said I loved Him, but I never moved on what He gave me, I never did anything for Him, and I never really **loved** Him beyond some verbal affirmation.

"One who has my commandments and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him." John 14:21

There has been much conjecture about verse 27. Let's read it, for it is the period at the end of the sentence: *"But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God."* Perhaps He was speaking specifically about the apostle John or perhaps it was something else. But in the context of the verse, I know exactly who He was talking about: ME. For I have indeed seen the kingdom of God. Have you?

"The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become... The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop." CS Lewis