

Truth for Today ***The Bible Explained***

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Discipleship is simple! Luke 9:23 **What does it mean to take up your cross daily?**

Introduction

Welcome to our second talk in our series, 'Discipleship is simple!' Last week's talk was the first in the series on, 'What does it mean to deny yourself?' Next week will be the final talk in the series on, 'What does it mean to follow Jesus?' Today we will consider, 'What does it mean to take up your cross daily?'

A few years ago, on Good Friday, my wife and I decided to walk from the Northumberland mainland to Holy Island and back again. It was on our return journey nearing the mainland that we encountered a large group of people heading out to Holy Island. Near the front of the group were a few people struggling to carry a large cross. It was obviously heavy, unwieldy and a burden that was not easy to manoeuvre. At this point they were on the causeway road, but they would soon be leaving the road and heading off across the sand on what is known as the pilgrim's way. It was certainly catching the attention of other people, like ourselves, who were not involved in the procession.

This event did not match the Scripture and the title of today's talk. This was a once a year activity whereas we will be considering the Lord's words indicating a daily requirement to take up the cross. The next difference that we noticed was that there were more than one endeavouring to carry this cross to Holy Island. The Lord states that each believer is to carry his own cross. It is an individual thing not a collective activity. Lastly, the journey was not to a specific place, such as Holy Island, but we are to carry the cross into every sphere of our daily lives. The teaching of the cross should characterise every Christian in a permanent way.

The Background Context

All three talks are closely related, being found in the same verse of Scripture, Luke chapter 9 verse 23. Just for a moment let us consider the context of the first half of chapter 9. The chapter commences with the Lord Jesus giving power and authority to the twelve disciples to go to the surrounding towns and preach the kingdom of God with supporting acts of healing the sick. We next come to the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish.

Who is Jesus?

The next point in the chapter is the Lord's question about Himself, "*Who do the crowds say that I am?*" The people had a few answers, all of which missed the mark. Then the Lord asked the disciples the same question and the answer was different, but exactly right, as Peter said, "*The Christ of God.*"

Why had Jesus Come?

The Lord Jesus had just established who He is, demonstrated His power to feed thousands and is able to delegate power to His disciples. Now the Lord Jesus changes the conversation entirely as we find in verse 22, *“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.”* The Lord Jesus frequently used the title ‘Son of Man’ to refer to Himself and He did so when healing and forgiving sins. As we know it is only God who can forgive sins, therefore the Son of Man is God. But the amazing thing that we have in this verse is the suffering Son of Man, the One who was to die but rise again the third day.

As I am preparing for this radio message, this country has over the last four years been commemorating in numerous ways the past hundred years that included two world wars. We have been reminded of the many acts of bravery and self-sacrifice by members of the armed forces and civilians. People probably did not intend to perform these acts of bravery, but it was a reaction to the situation in which they found themselves. The Lord Jesus Christ, from before the moment of His incarnation and subsequent birth, knew what He would do. He came to die upon the cross at Calvary. But He was also aware of all the events that led up to the night of betrayal, miscarriage of justice and the condemning to death by Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus did not think about Himself; He had come into this world to follow the will of his Father. In Luke chapter 22 verse 42, we have these very precious words prayed by the Lord Jesus, *“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”*

The Challenge

The above two quoted verses are an important introduction to the following few verses which apply to those who are true followers of the Lord Jesus. Let us read from Luke chapter 9 and verses 23 – 26, *“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. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? 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.”*”

As the Lord Jesus had come in a self-sacrificing way as determined by the will of His Father, so the Lord Jesus lays down the challenge that His followers should have the same attitude and commitment in their lives. This is not self-seeking, self-preservation, self-centredness or any other ‘selfie’ attitude we can think about. These verses leave out ‘me’ and put the Lord Jesus Christ firmly as the motivation for my life.

The cross

When we think about ‘The cross,’ our minds almost naturally go to the Lord Jesus Christ and His unjust condemnation at the hands of His enemies. Also, we would consider how God used that same situation to deal with sin righteously in order to provide a means of bringing blessing to mankind.

The cross meant the end of everything as far as this world was concerned. Anyone who was crucified had only hours to live. Crucifixion was a barbaric form of execution, to maximise suffering but delay death for as long as possible. It was not a quick execution. The disciples of the Lord Jesus would be aware of crucifixion. The historian, Josephus, records that hundreds of Galilean insurrectionists were crucified by the Romans as punishment and as a warning to quell any

possible further trouble. The cross ended life and all associations as far as this world was concerned.

If anyone desires to come after Me

Verse 23 commences with, "*If anyone desires to come after Me*". The word translated 'desires' is intended to convey 'uncompromising determination' to follow the Lord Jesus. Life would be characterised by doing everything with the conscious knowledge that this would have the approval of my Lord and Saviour.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians chapter 1 verse 21 states, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" The aim in Paul's life was to imitate his Lord and Saviour; nothing else mattered. With that attitude Paul had a deep care and concern for fellow Christians. He prayed for them, encouraged them and taught them how to live a Christ honouring life. This was a very practical approach to living. It showed to others that Christianity was real; it changed people for the better. The lawless became law abiding. The selfish became selfless. A genuine interest in others was shown by Paul's care. Paul imitated his Lord in every way possible. Paul's life was not only orientated towards Christians, but he had a deep concern for the blessing of others. His main interest was preaching the good news of salvation to all people that they too might enjoy the blessing of eternal life through trusting Christ as Saviour.

Take up his cross daily

This leads us into the subject of our talk. What is needed to live a Christ centred life is the application of the cross. At one time you could purchase wrist bands that had the words printed on it, 'What would Jesus do?' The bands were intended to be a reminder of how to respond in any given circumstance. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus said, "*take up his cross daily*", it was a reminder for every day that it was a "*take up his cross*" day. Those who are true Christians are into the 24/7 for every day of the year. No day off. Every day for the rest of my life is to be lived for the Lord Jesus Christ. Holidays are no exception.

Now the cross implies dying to something. That something is the whole world system where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. The Lord Jesus was rejected by the religious system of the day, by the governing authority, both military and political, and by the ordinary people. Truly accepting the Lord Jesus as your Saviour will automatically be an excluding factor by this world. You are no longer an accepted and recognised member of the world system; you are now a misfit. If you do not find that you are misunderstood and not fitting in with this world, then maybe you need to consider whether you are truly showing that you are a Christian! Being a Christian is a real challenge; it is not an easy ride.

So why are Christians excluded and on the outside? Because being a Christian identifies you with Jesus. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, the Saviour of the world who shows the love and compassion of God and desires the salvation and blessing for mankind. God is a God of love. God the Father has shown this by sending His own beloved Son into this world to die as the sin bearer so that we sinful people can be forgiven and given the joy of a heavenly blessing. But God also finds sin and rebellion to His will as something that must be judged. Therefore, every true Christian should be a reminder in some way that people have to do with a sin hating God and a day of judgment.

In the main, people do not want to be reminded of judgment, because that means accountability for how we have lived. This is a very uncomfortable consideration for non-Christians. The world has views as to what happens after a person dies. Some of these are as follows,

- Once dead and that is it, no more existence.
- We all go to heaven.
- We will be reincarnated as something else.

Scripture is very clear that there is a heaven, a place of blessing, and that there is a hell, the place of everlasting torment. The decision as to where we go depends upon our acceptance or rejection of God's offer of salvation which is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus made this very clear in John's Gospel chapter 14 verse 6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

There is a very solemn account of two men in Luke chapter 16 verses 19 – 31. In this account of a very real situation mirroring many issues of life, the Lord Jesus draws back the veil of what happens after death. The story recounts two very different characters; one has fared very well and been extremely successful in life and wants for nothing. The other person is at the opposite end of the social scale, totally unsuccessful and is living rough on the streets. This person begs for his living. This was written about two thousand years ago and it is still a situation that is seen in towns and cities around the world today. The next event in this story is that they both die, apparently at the same time. In Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 we have God's final word on an inevitable event which applies to all people, *"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."*

With the veil drawn back to show the 'after life', we find that fortunes have been reversed. The rich person who lacked for nothing is now bereft of everything and his situation is far worse than the homeless person who often begged near his house. The stark reality shows life after death; the body may die but the soul is very much alive and conscious of its surroundings. It is now that the true spiritual state of the rich man is revealed. He is away from God and in a place of torment with an unquenchable thirst. The story is told in a Jewish setting as the man looks up and sees Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. He appeals for relief from his thirst, but Abraham can only reply that there is a great gulf fixed and there is no transfer from or to that place of torment. With Abraham is the homeless beggar in a place of comfort and security, no torment but blessing.

Everyone should read Luke chapter 16 because it is a wakeup chapter that life is not only about living in this world. Preparing for the next world after death must be made while alive in this world because when you die, transfer is immediate to either heaven or hell. God's word is clear, in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 5, *"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."* There is only one way to salvation, blessing and the security of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is Jesus that makes the difference.

Now I stated earlier, the cross implies dying. Romans chapter 6 covers both the teaching of what it means to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and the implications of being baptised. Let us read verses 1 to 13, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing*

this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Although this is a long Scripture to read it is full of useful teaching for anyone who wants to put into practice the joy of living in this world for the Lord Jesus Christ. This Scripture from Romans chapter 6 teaches the importance of baptism and what it means. We are baptized into His death. It means that the things of this world have become dead to me. They are not the prime reason for living. At this point, let me say that we are very much alive to this world. We live here, we have a home and relationships, we need to shop for food and so forth. These are very necessary things. Therefore, what are the changes that baptism causes? Paul in his letter to the Ephesian Christians stated in chapter 4 the following:

- stop lying and speak the truth
- control your anger
- stop stealing, even in small things
- do an honest day's work for a day's pay
- control your language, let it be clean words
- grieve not the holy Spirit of God who lives in you

Change to a positive lifestyle,

- Be kind
- Be compassionate
- Be ready to forgive others.

However, do not be surprised if the world does not appreciate the positive as the world is so used and more comfortable with the negative and destructive features from which you have turned away. So, the above from Romans chapter 6 refers to living a new kind of life. We have been freed from sin because we trusted Christ. Therefore, Christians are no longer slaves to sin to be captivated by its allurements. We are to live daily positive lives that mirror how the Saviour lived. Let me close by reading a hymn,

*Saviour, we long to follow Thee,
Daily Thy cross to bear,
And count all else, whate'er it be,
Unworthy of our care.*

*We are not now our own, but Thine,
The purchase of Thy blood,
And made, by grace and love divine,
The sons and heirs of God.*

*Thy Spirit, too, the present seal
Of all the Father's love,
Dwells in our souls and does reveal,
The glorious rest above.*

*Thy life is now beyond the grave;
Our souls Thou hast set free;
Life, strength, and grace in Thee we have,
For we are one with Thee.*

*O teach us so the power to know
Of risen life with Thee;
Not we may live while here below,
But Christ our life may be.*

J G Deck 1802 - 1884

Thank you for listening to 'Truth for Today', talk 1095, 'What does it mean to take up your cross daily?'.
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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.

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