

The Cross-Shaped Life (Good Friday)

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[0 : 00] Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, Who did the crowd say that I am?

And they answered, John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah. And others, and one of the prophets of old has risen.

And he said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, The Christ of God.

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 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.

And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

[1 : 03] For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save me. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

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 all the angels.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. This is the word of the Lord. The weeks leading up to Resurrection Sunday are when people think about Christianity a lot more than usual.

People that are not normally church groups, not Christians. And a lot of people assume that they know what Christianity is all about. But there are a lot of misconceptions about what Christianity really is, what it means to be a true Christian.

For example, many people think of Christianity the same way that they think about charms or talismans. Nowadays I hear that who's, what do you call those, the ham, the hamza hand.

[2 : 19] Jewelries are popular. A hand with like an eye on it. Or an eye jewelry is supposed to protect people against the evil eye, which is supposed to bring a curse. It has Middle Eastern or Latin origin, but it's very popular here in North America now.

Or if you're walking around the streets in Cambridge Street, at the restaurants on Cambridge Street, you probably notice the maneki deko, the cat, with the hand waving.

It has a Chinese character that means good luck, good fortune written on the token. And people believe that it brings them good luck. It will bring more customers. And in much the same way, some people think of Christianity like that.

They hang wooden crosses on their walls. Or have statues of Catholic saints in their yards, as if that's going to ward off evil and bring good fortune.

Some other people think about Christianity as like any sort of an insurance coverage. They make sure that their children and grandchildren are baptized after they're born, even though they pay no heed to their Christian upbringing afterward.

[3 : 28] They attend worship services on Easter, Christmas, but the rest of their lives bear no resemblance to Christ and his Easter. It's for them just an insurance coverage.

In case something goes wrong, something's happened to me, at least uncovered. Some other people use Christianity as a crutch. They feel lonely, so they turn to church for community.

They are poor, so they turn to church for financial support. They rely on Christianity to provide a social network, or a system of morality, so that they can improve themselves as human beings, as moral citizens.

It functions as a crutch to meet their needs. But Christianity as defined by Jesus in this passage is not a charm or an insurance coverage or a crutch, but rather a cross.

A cross that we're supposed to bear every day. And what I mean by that is that we are to follow the character of Christ to bore the cross for us, and follow an example of humility, submission, his suffering.

[4 : 34] That's what a true Christian is. That's the main point of this passage, that a true Christian takes up his cross daily. To follow Jesus Christ. And we examine this passage in three parts by looking at the crowds, the Christ, and the Christian.

First, let's look at the crowds and their speculation concerning Jesus in verse 18 to 19. When Jesus was away from the crowds and alone with his disciples, Jesus asked his disciples in verse 18, Who do the crowds say that I am?

And they reply in verse 19, John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others say one of the prophets of old has risen. These were the most popular opinions about Jesus in their day. And these are kind of flattering identifications, aren't they? They're not really bad rumors. These are all great people. John the Baptist, according to Jesus' own judgment in Luke 7.28, in terms of his relation to God and his privileged status as a forerunner to the Messiah.

He is the greatest prophet and indeed the greatest human being that ever lived of the time of Jesus. Elijah, similarly, was a great prophet, one of the most powerful prophets in the Old Testament.

[5 : 48] And in fact, Luke has been building his comparison with Elijah throughout the Gospel by comparing their ministries intentionally. The third option is also a great one.

It's just one of the great prophets of old has risen. There was popular expectation that a great prophet of old would return. And so all three of these are really flattering options for who Jesus might be.

The crowds are not saying nasty things about him. They adore him, in fact, and they're saying wonderful things about him. But even though the crowd's estimation of Jesus is high, it's not high enough.

as we learn the following verses. And there's a lesson here for us. Many people in our day still have very good opinions about Jesus.

Muslims believe that Jesus was one of the highest ranked and most beloved prophets. The Sikhs believe that Jesus was a high ranked holy man.

[6 : 48] Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is the highest of all God's creatures. Christian scientists believe that Jesus was the first human to manifest fully the truth of Christian science.

Some political and social theories believe that Jesus was a social and political revolutionary that preached liberation and called for radical restructuring of society.

Many Buddhists, atheists, and secular moral theists believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher. It's a great thing to say about somebody.

Their estimation of Jesus is high, but it's not high enough. That's the crowd. Why? That brings me to our second point, to Christ.

Look at verse 20 with me. Then Jesus said to them, What do you say that I am? And Peter answered, The Christ of God. Before explaining what Peter's reply means, let me first point your attention to how Jesus rephrases his question.

[7 : 55] Jesus is saying, in effect, That's enough of what the crowd say about me. What do you say that I am? Jesus is not really interested in the public sentiment or public approval.

He couldn't care less about that. He's asking his disciples, and he's asking you tonight, Who do you say that I am?

Many of you have had all kinds of ideas about who Jesus is. And many of you have had ideas that are not your own, but simply an assimilation of what the crowds say, what the masses say about Jesus.

But you cannot become a Christian, a Father of Christ be of toxic. You must make up your own mind about what Jesus is. You have to have a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

And I want to ask you, have you ever seriously, open-mindedly, and honestly consider the question, What do you say that I am? And tonight, this has been an opportunity to say.

[9 : 00] We have Peter's answer recorded here in verse 20, the Christ of God. Even though it's Peter alone who speaks, he's answering really for all of the apostles, the twelve, because he's the leader among the apostles.

That's why Jesus' initial question is addressed to all of them, and his charge not to speak of it later is also addressed to all of the apostles. He's speaking for them all. And the word Christ is not Jesus'

last name, but the title that means Messiah, or anointed one, because the Jews believe in accordance with the Old Testament prophecies, that God would raise up a king from the line of David, who would represent the presence of God and the favor of God back upon his people, and that he would restore the kingdom of God to his former glory and splendor.

He would save God's people, Israel. And related to this concept of the anointed one to Christ is the idea of the Son of God, because prophecies like Psalm 2 said that God called the Messianic King, his son, in Psalm 2, 7-8.

And so far in the Gospel of Luke, this is a remarkable profession, because for those who have been with us through the series, the profession of Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God have been made throughout the Gospel of Luke up to this point only by God himself or by angelic beings.

In Luke 2, 11, an angel announced that Jesus is a Savior who is Christ the Lord, combining the concept of Christ the anointed one with the divine Lord. In Luke 3, 22, God the Father said of Jesus, You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.

[10:41] In Luke 4, 41, he brought together the concept of the Christ and the Son of God. And when a demon, coming out of a demon of this man said, You are the Son of God.

And then Jesus rebukes the demons, telling them not to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. So Jesus' true identity has been hidden up to this point from recognition by humans.

But here we see Peter, a mere mortal, making this momentous profession that Jesus is in Christ of God, that would restore the kingdom of God to Jesus.

And what Peter is saying is really amazing, but what Jesus says next seems nonsensical. Because he says in verses 21 to 22, Jesus strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and cheap priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Jesus, even though he is the Messianic King, predicts for himself suffering, rejection, and even death. And this must have been profoundly confusing for these disciples who have seen him demonstrate his authority and power over and over again over nature, over demons, over diseases, and even over death itself.

[12:10] So what do you mean, Jesus? You're the one, you're the king that people are supposed to welcome and hail as their king. What do you mean the cheap priests and the elders will reject you? You are the one who is supposed to kill our enemies.

What do you mean you're going to be killed? Why is this the case? It's because Jesus is teaching us that his path to glory, his path to reign, his glorious reign as the Messianic King will go through the path of humility and suffering.

And that's necessary because what God's people need to deliver us from was not primarily the oppression of others, but it was deliverance that they needed from their own sins and their own rebellion against God.

Because it was their sin and rebellion against God that had brought them to the condition that they are in now of exile, of alienation from God, of rejection, of lostness from the kingdom of God.

They had used the temple like a charm, thinking that just because they had the temple of God, no evil would be all of them. They used the religion, they used Christianity, they used their faith, the Jews, as a crutch.

[13:27] Instead of serving God and loving God as who he is, they turned to another God when they needed reign. They turned to the God Ashtoreth when they needed to have children.

They used these things because what they were after was not really God himself. They were not worshipping him, but they were using him. To get their ends. And the situation is the same for all of us.

We've all sinned and rebelled against God. We've ungratefully used God's good gifts instead of acknowledging the giver of all good gifts and worshipping him. We are creatures, but we have presumed as creatures to invent our own priorities and purposes in life instead of submitting to the will of our creator.

We've disobeyed God's laws. And because of that, we have been separated from God. And we need rescuing from our own sins.

And so even the 12 apostles don't quite grasp the full significance of this until later, after Jesus' death and resurrection. But that's what we're reflecting on tonight because Jesus' encroachment ceremony is his execution on the cross.

[14 : 42] Because that's the path he chose to save his people and to gather our people for himself in the giving of God. That's who the Christ is. And Jesus chose this path of suffering and rejection and death because he loved us.

He wanted to save us. And it's his example that sets the path for the Christian. And that brings us to our third point, the Christian. What does it look like to live as a Christian?

Jesus sums it up in verse 23. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. The phrase, come after me, is the language of discipleship.

And so this is the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. That's what a Christian is. And it involves three things. And the first thing is to deny oneself. And the second thing is to take up the cross daily, once crossed daily.

And the third thing is following Jesus. So the first step is self-denial. In order to follow Christ, there must be a fundamental shift in our allegiance.

[15 : 47] We must go from living for ourselves to living for Christ. We must go from indulging our own wills to denying ourselves in order to obey God's will.

Our lives are to be God-oriented and God-directed rather than self-oriented and self-directed. That means everything you think, everything you say, everything you do, everything you buy, it's no longer for yourself but for God and His Lord.

And denying oneself is a prerequisite for accepting God's will. Which brings us to the second aspect of God's Christian discipleship. the disciple of Christ must take up his cross.

Crucifixion was a form of Roman execution and it was a picture of a cross and a picture of death. And the crucifixion was something, it was a punishment so cruel that the Romans reserved it exclusively to themselves.

When they crucified criminals, they also forced them to carry their own cross to the place of their death and usually they reserved that punishment for people who were guilty of treason.

[17 : 00] So a picture of someone carrying a cross to his own death is a picture of that person's total submission to Rome's absolute authority.

That's what taking up one's cross means. It means that a disciple of Christ must surrender completely to the authority of God. This is not a literal command to die for Christ.

Because Jesus says that his disciple must take up his cross daily. And since you can physically die for Christ only once, there's a figurative meaning to it. You're supposed to die for him daily.

And that means to acknowledge every day that living for yourself is a way of death and choosing to live and to believe in Jesus and to live for him in every aspect of your life.

Paul puts it this way in Galatians 2.20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[18 : 09] So to take up one's cross daily is to die to oneself and to live to Christ. And but even though the primary meaning here is figurative, because Jesus himself was persecuted and killed, he taught that those who follow him too will be persecuted.

And this could mean suffering, rejection, and even death for following Christ. Taking a far cross does mean martyrdom for some people.

discipleship. The third aspect of Christian discipleship is following Jesus. It means learning Jesus' teachings and observing the pattern of his life and following it.

Discipleship in the ancient world also entails joining yourself with other disciples who are also following the same teacher. And likewise being a Christian involves joining yourself to a church, which is the group of disciples who are following Jesus together.

And having explained the essence of the Christian life, Jesus then gives three parallel reasons to motivate us in verses 24 to 26.

[19 : 17] There's three different things really saying the same thing. The first reason is this, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Whoever claims to his own life and tries to preserve his autonomy, his independence, his own lordship over his own life, instead of surrendering his life to God, to Christ will actually end up losing his life.

But whoever forsakes his or her life for the sake of following Christ will end up saving their lives. Second, for what does it prop him in if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

What good is spending your entire life earning billions of dollars? What good is having all the respect and power you could have in this world? If you die apart from Christ and perish eternally. Third, for whoever is ashamed of me and of my works, of him will a son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels, who reject Christ in this life, will himself be rejected by Christ in the next life, when Christ returns with his heavenly glory.

[20 : 37] Then, Jesus gives a bonus encouragement in verse 26 to assure his followers that denying yourself and taking up your cross and telling him he's not in vain, he tells them, but I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

This is really a preview of our passage for Sunday. What Jesus is promising here is that what you're doing in following Jesus is not wishful thinking. In fact, there are some among my own disciples here, these old disciples among the twelve, that will see with their own eyes the kingdom of God before their death.

What are the comforts and pleasures of this life that make you cling to your life instead of giving it up to Christ? What are the things in your life that you value more highly than Jesus Christ and the eternal life he offers?

Whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What are your personal ambitions that prevent you from pursuing the priorities and purposes of Christ? what plans have you laid for your life that you are not willing to exchange for God's plan? What are you trying to gain with all of it?

[22 : 08] What does the profit of man if he gain the whole world and loses or forfeits his soul, himself? What are the people you are trying to impress, to please?

A man? A woman? A friend? A parent? A boss? The crowds? What good is it to be esteemed and popular in this world if King Jesus in all his glory is ashamed of you and will not receive you in this kingdom?

Have you openly, sincerely and seriously weighed these questions? Perhaps you have not consciously rejected Jesus but you have never seriously considered them.

Perhaps you're just too busy. But what about the 50, 60 years that you might have left of your life here on earth? It's so all important that you neglect the questions of eternity.

What about that next application or grant or paper or project or deadline or client? is so all important that you risk forfeiting your soul for it.

[23 : 29] What does it cost a man? He gave the whole world yet loses or forfeits himself. Some people mistakenly think that the Christian life which calls us to deny ourselves and take up our cross, they think that it's mistakenly that it must be a drudgery.

Who wants to live a life like that. But that cannot be further from the truth. Do you call getting up the daily latte on your commute for a year so that you could save money and buy an engagement bank for your girlfriend?

Do you call that a sacrifice? Do you call eating home cooked meals instead of eating out in restaurants? Do you could save for your sacred child's college tuition?

Do you call that a sacrifice? Do you call experiencing momentary pain a vaccination so that you're not afflicted with more serious illnesses later a sacrifice?

Do you call losing sleep at night to take care of alien parents who loved and supported you for your entire life? Do you call that a sacrifice? No, that's not a sacrifice.

[24 : 43] That's a privilege. It's a blessing. It's an investment for the future. Forgoing the conveniences of this life, risking danger, experiencing suffering and persecution, giving up your life out of love for the Savior who gave himself for you so that you might share eternity in glory with him.

It's not a sacrifice. That's a privilege. That's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. It's a blessing. to gain what he cannot lose.

On October 28th, 1949, Jim Elliot penned a journal entry. He said this, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Then after years of preparation, on January 3, 1956, he along with four other missionaries landed in the jungles of Ecuador in order to share the saving message of Jesus with the Alca Indians.

The Alca's were a notoriously dangerous tribe, and they had previously attacked all the foreigners that had come in contact with them. And these missionaries understood the dangers.

[26 : 10] Their wives had already discussed the possibility of being widowed. And five days after their landing, all five men were ambushed and speared to death by the Alca's.

All were married. All four of them were fathers. One wife was pregnant. And her three-year-old was overheard telling later the newborn baby, crying baby, Never you mind.

When we get to heaven, I'll show you which one is dead. The rescue party that came, only to recover their dead bodies, found Jim Elliott's diary, and this was his last journal entry before the Alca's came for him.

All the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth. I care not if I never raise my voice again for him.

If only I may love him, please him. Perhaps in mercy he shall give me a host of children. By that he means spiritual children, converts.

[27 : 16] Then I might lead them through the vast star fields to explore his delicacies, whose finger ends set them to burn. But if not, if only I may see him, touch his garments, and smile into his eyes, then not stars nor children share, not shall matter, only himself.

O Jesus, Master and Center and End of all, How long before that glory which is yours, which has so long waited you, Now there is no thought of you among men, But then there shall be thought for nothing else.

Now other men are praised, Then none shall care for any other's merits. Hasten, hasten, glory of heaven. Take your crown.

Subdue your kingdom. Enthrall your creatures. Jim Elliot died without any spiritual children among the others.

But that day he saw Jesus, And neither stars nor children mattered, Only Jesus. Because he had denied himself, He had taken up his cross to follow Jesus.

[28 : 33] He saved his life because he lost it for Christ's sake. He lost the world, but he gained his soul. He was unashamed of Jesus and his words.

And Christ the King was not ashamed of him To receive him into his glory. It's my prayer tonight that all of you Will take a long and hard look at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Then count the cross. And follow him. Thank you. Good. I'm enjoying this. And drive me through it. Thank you. Peace. I'm sorry.

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