

Bearing the Cross

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Introduction: From Gabbatha to Golgotha

John 19:13-17

“¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha;

¹⁴ And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!

¹⁵ But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

¹⁶ Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.

¹⁷ And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha”

The picture offered to our imaginations is a gory one as Jesus, once more tried and falsely convicted, begins His ascent from the elevated place of trial in Jerusalem to Golgotha – the elevated place of His sacrifice outside the city gates and walls. He has been beaten, mocked, scourged, bloodied, spat upon, ridiculed and now forced to carry the patibulum to which He will finally be nailed in crucifixion. His body physically giving away under the torment and a bystander conscripted into service to assist with its weight. Finally atop the place of crucifixion called Golgotha, Jesus surrendered Himself in being nailed to the cross and erected in shame – He who is sinless suffering for we sinners and in our place. Here he will be suspended between heaven and earth for a span of six terrible hours until giving up the ghost and finalizing His propitiatory death and sacrifice.

This day had not been an isolated or unplanned event. Peter tells us that this plan had been determined and agreed upon among the Godhead from eternity past (**Acts 2:23**). Jesus knew fully why He had been sent (**Galatians 4:4-5**) and exactly what would transpire (**John 12:31-32**). Most importantly, He understood that He would have to do so voluntarily and alone (**Philippians 2:6-8**). Emmanuel, God with Us, would be experiencing the iniquity of us all upon His flesh and healing us by His stripes (**Isaiah 53:5**).

The reality is the terrible trip from Gabbatha to Golgotha was simply the final leg of Christ's journey which had spanned over three decades. He spent His entire earthly life preparing to be the perfect sacrifice which would be accepted by His Father, satisfy the offended Law and pay the penalty for every man's sins. That was a cross / burden which He bore every day of his life on Earth (**Hebrews 4:15**).

I. Bearing a Cross

a. From a **practical standpoint**, the bearing of one's own cross / patibulum was meant to be physically agonizing, emotionally draining and the final straw in breaking a man's spirit and will. Jesus offered Himself willingly and purposefully in fulfillment of the demands of the Law, the needs of fallen and sinful men, and His Father's demand for holiness prior to reconciliation.

b. **It was meant to be a spectacle.** What could have been done privately or stealthily, was instead completed in public in a show of force from the occupiers and humiliation for the condemned. The Roman government was not the only audience seeking a public demonstration. The Jewish religious and political leaders had incited an angry mob which cried for Jesus to be crucified (**Luke 23:21**) and vocalized their allegiance to Caesar alone (**John 19:15**). The Psalmist had described such a scene in what we refer to as the crucifixion psalm (**Psalms 22**).

c. **It was most assuredly a one way trip.** The condemned was aware that his burden's end was the very instrument of death and suffering. In Jesus' case, the cross also symbolized all that He was taking upon Himself (the sins of the world) and all He had borne through the world to this point. It served as more than simply a finish line. It was the culmination of the entire life of Christ and the offering of Himself in place of fallen men. It was a very visible completion of all that the Father had required Him to do when Jesus spoke His final words "It is finished" upon the cross, then bowed His head and gave up the ghost (**John 19:30**).

d. Local laws also made **capital punishment illegal within the walls** of the "holy city" thus Golgotha and similar sites were used regularly for crucifixions. As a result, the trek up and out of Jerusalem was the final meeting of the legal requirements before sentence could be executed. This time, while it was certainly humiliating and a psychological torment, it was the completion of the most important task ever completed upon earth....and only Jesus Christ could do it.

e. Physically, there was a **significant weight to the patibulum** which was the portion of the cross usually carried by the condemned. The weight of a typical patibulum was between 75# and 110#, a challenge to a man of average build and healthy condition. In a scourged and exhausted man, it was a different challenge altogether. Because of love, Jesus did pick up His cross / patibulum, carried it and laid Himself upon it as our sacrifice (**Hebrews 12:1-2**).

II. Bearing The Cross

Luke 9:23-25

*²³ And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me.*

²⁴ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

²⁵ For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"

We are instructed to "take up" our cross daily. "Take up" – G142 – **"to raise up, to lift, to take upon oneself and to carry what has been raised physically; to bear; to bear away what has been raised and carry off."**

a. Finding our cross – salvation: being set free and having a choice between serving the Lord or serving something / someone else.

b. Picking up our cross – sanctification: taking up the weight of living for Christ; becoming a disciple and choosing to die with Christ.

c. Bearing the Cross – becoming a genuine and mature disciple: bearing our cross away from the place of our conversion (Calvary) and into the footsteps of our Savior.

The deceptive façade of this world suggests to us that it is more pleasant to live than to die. The flesh seeks to live and to be nourished so this "feels" correct to us. It appears to be more prosperous to live in and of the world as well. God's Word contradicts this by stating in **I John 2:15-17**, *¹⁵ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The greatest opportunity before a Christian is to spend his life voluntarily dying to self and living in the footsteps of Jesus. The Psalmist wrestled with a similar thought long ago and came to a satisfying conclusion in the 17th verse of the 73rd Psalm.

III. Bearing Your Cross

I've heard people refer to physical handicaps or weaknesses as their "cross to bear". Likewise, I have witnessed Christians growing through trouble and trials referring to such a "rough patch" as a cross to be borne. In actuality, the cross we have to bear as individuals are in neither of these categories. Rather, bearing one's cross is actively pursuing life and lifestyle in which we "crucify" our fleshly desires, our wills and aspirations in light of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over our life. Larger, it is to die to the world and self that we may walk with Christ through this world

in His example that we may be succeed in life and receive a crown of life (**James 1:12 / Revelation 2:10**). Paul made reference to “dying daily” (I **Corinthians 15:31**) and mortifying the deeds of the flesh (**Romans 8:13 / Colossians 3:5**).

1. A prerequisite for discipleship

Luke 14:26-27 ^{“26} *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*

²⁷ *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”*

Jesus states that we must hate (love less) everything and everyone including ourselves in order to be a disciple; then frankly, He states that if a man does not bear his cross and follow after Him (Christ), he also cannot be a disciple. Thus, if a Christian determines to NOT bear his cross, he is deciding to forfeit the practice of discipleship.

2. It is the third portion of the Great Commission left to His church

Matthew 28:18-20 ^{“18} And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Teach them to be cross bearers!

Charles H Spurgeon once said, “The Christian grows rich by his losses, he lives by dying, and become full by being emptied.”

God intends for everyone to be saved, but not all will be. He intends for all who are converted to be baptized, but not all will be obedient to His command and example. Jesus expects all who have been baptized to be discipled, but likely a small percentage will become genuine disciples. This brings us to the issue before us as ministers and pastors...

IV. The Pastoral Example

It is clear that a Spirit-placed pastor is responsible for the flock over which he has been entrusted as under shepherd. He is also the first, and sometimes best, teacher towards assisting believers in becoming genuine disciples. The pastor also has an obligation to be a visible example of true discipleship. All ministers have this obligation.

Hebrews 13:7 *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”*

rule – G2233 “To lead”; conversation – G391 “manner of life / living”

I Corinthians 11:1 “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

followers : G3402 – an imitator

I Peter 5:1-4 *“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

³ Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

“examples” – G5179 – “a blow ; an impression, the mark of a blow”

Our example is not our best efforts or qualities. It is the stamp of Christ and that stamp is the proof of our dying with Him while carrying our cross.

John 20:25 ²⁵ *“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

“print” – G5179 – the same word as above! A blow or impression made by a striking.

Why should a pastor expect his flock to seek genuine discipleship and cross bearing if: 1. He doesn't teach it properly and regularly and 2. If they can't see its results in His life, preaching and family?

They want to see success, something worth emulating....so show them Jesus! The better we can bear our crosses and die to self while mortifying the flesh, the more they (and the world) will see Jesus in us!

V. Practical examples

a. The apostles - Matthew left a promising and lucrative career; Peter and Andrew left their livelihoods; James and John left their father. Paul gave this testimony and exhortation to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:7-10, 17

"⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

¹⁷ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample."

An immature disciple will list and publicize all the many things he has had to give up in order to follow Christ and bear his cross.

A mature disciple, like Paul, describes the same actions in this manner, "I loosed everything in my hand/control that I might grasp Christ with both hands to ensure I remain in His presence and am able to bear my cross after Him."

b. Martyrs – Martyr's Mirror and Foxe's Book of Martyrs relate the physical horrors experienced by millions of our spiritual forefathers from the time of Christ through the next 16 centuries. It is difficult to imagine a person inflicting such torture and atrocities on a fellow human. And yet, some degree of such persecution has continued in various parts of the world since that time and is ongoing today by evil people following the prince of this world in persecution of any who claim the name of our Lord.

c. Colonial America – Margaret Muse Clay was an ordinary 18th century wife and mother. She lived in Virginia where Baptists were legally persecuted at the time she heard and obeyed the gospel preached from a prison cell. She eagerly took up her cross by uniting with a Baptist church and was baptized in the James River. At night. By moonlight. Despite threats of fines and imprisonment, she gained the reputation as a faithful follower of God and an exhorter of others. She was just one of many suffering for God's cause, but she was also my 6th great-grandmother.

d. Present America – According to **I Peter 2:9**, like believers of all ages, we are a peculiar people; God's own possession. **I Corinthians 6:19-20** *"What? Know ye not that your body in the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

This world is still not our friend. So we also must bear our cross in a hostile environment. Satan has many pitfalls for believers and leaders of believers in our disintegrating society -- so many that all of us together couldn't compile a complete list. I have chosen one area to illustrate Satan's subtlety. Social media is pervasive and double-edged. It is a good way to access sermons, service schedules, prayer requests, praise reports, and to communicate with God's far-flung people. But, it can be difficult to keep completely separate from the general "me" tone of that media (and cross bearers deny self so that others may see Jesus through them).

Advice columnist Ann Landers had a three-way test for speech: 1. Is it true? 2. Is it kind? 3. Is it necessary? The best test for speech AND actions remains, Is it Christ-like? The Scripture plainly says that, "God is love". Paul gives a list of things that charity (love) does and a list of what it doesn't do in **I Corinthians 13**. Charity vaunteth not itself. Several years ago, I was pastor of a church which was blessed with a good number of aged saints. The church maintained a parking place closest to the door marked "PASTOR". Being uncomfortable with this, I began refraining from using the spot until one aged sister informed me that she had been parking beside the pastor for 40 years.....and that she didn't intend to stop now! A little problem solving resulted in our family taking two cars to church each week with the kids' minivan parked in the "pastor" spot and my vehicle out by the street.

VI. Trading the Cross for a Crown

The Old Rugged Cross: “ I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown.”

I can't help but to realize that Jesus knew, as He bore His cross, that it was soon at an end and that He would never have to suffer again for the sins of men.....and, that He would be able to redeem all men from their sins while reconciling them to His Father.

Hebrews 12:2 *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

When we get to the crest of our lives and the cross may be getting even heavier, our joy should be knowing that our suffering and struggle in the flesh is nearly over. In days past and gone, life was more austere and people worked to eat and live only. Life was heavy and burdensome and so the idea of being released into the rest of Heaven was very appealing. In our society of recreation and entertainment and prosperity, one can almost see Christians shudder at the mere suggestion of willingly and purposely surrendering this life in order to die with Christ in discipleship.

Jesus' life ended with a completely spent and broken body atop Calvary's hill. May we also spend our entire strength and life's energy in carrying our cross after Christ and when we are without strength, enjoy the sweet release into eternal rest without reservation or regret.

Hebrews 2:7-11

“⁷ Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

⁸ Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

¹⁰ For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

¹¹ For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”

Romans 8:16-18

¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

¹⁷ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

¹⁸ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Conclusion

When we surrender (cease resistance) for salvation, it is one and done. The surrender to bear our cross is daily. It is a walk, an individual walk. But, like salvation, the joy of that walk can (and should) be shared with everyone. Jesus still says, “Follow me.”

The disciples followed Jesus from the hill of Gabbatha to the hill of Golgatha. Then quit. Peter wanted no part of cross bearing that day. It took our risen Savior to give Peter the encouragement to pick up his cross again. Want your best life now? Bear your cross.