

The Cross: Absolutely Essential (Part 2)  
Matthew 16:24-25

02-08-15

When kids turn sixteen, they often take an in-car driving course to prepare them for their driver's license test. I want you to imagine with me a driving instructor who meticulously teaches the student how to properly adjust the seat and put on the seat belt, how to adjust the mirrors so that the view is as clear as possible. He talks about how to hold the steering wheel and the importance of making smooth turns to the right or left. The use of the CD player is explained in detail. The instructor has an interesting lesson on operating the air conditioner and heater, pointing out all the adjustments of air flow, heat and cool levels and fan speed. He teaches the student all the speed levels on the windshield wiper knob and where to find each light switch. The experience is enjoyable and the instructor is very pleasant and articulate as he communicates all this helpful information. However, the student is never taught how to turn on the ignition so that the power of the engine is available for the process. Many helpful things are taught, but the student is also not taught how to put the car in gear and operate the accelerator. So the instruction given is not wrong; it simply leaves out the main point; and when the main point is left out, the rest matters very little. We leaders must be careful not to make that kind of mistake in ministering the word of God. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, without entry into that reality by faith, the rest will ultimately make little difference. Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes...."<sup>1</sup> The Church must be diligent to keep the main thing of the gospel, the main thing!

Last week we talked about the central place the Cross has (1) in God's Plan of Salvation and (2) in the Church's message to the world and to believers<sup>2</sup>. This morning I want to talk about the importance of the cross (3) in the Holy Spirit's work in our daily lives.

We will never enjoy the fullness of life and victory if we only see the cross as a historical event that occurred 2,000 years ago. It is certainly that! Christianity rests upon the historical fact of Jesus' death, burial & resurrection. Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:14, "...if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain" (KJV). The death and resurrection of Jesus is something that happened in time and space with eternal, cosmic consequences: a historical fact.

But Scripture teaches how that historical event affects each one of us in our daily lives and in our eternal destiny. The Holy Spirit has come to apply the realities of the cross and the power of Jesus' resurrection to your life and mine. He opens the eyes of our understanding<sup>3</sup> to the Provision that is ours through the Cross of Christ and He leads us in the application of the Principle of the Cross in our personal lives.

#### I. PROVISION of the Cross

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Many Christians acknowledge the importance of the cross in its message to the world; they understand that without the cross in the evangelistic message, there can be no salvation. But we must also see the continuation of the principle in our message to believers. Without the cross they cannot follow Christ (Matt. 16:24; Gal. 2:20).

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 1:18.

In 2 Cor 5:21 Paul describes an exchange that occurred when Jesus died on the cross. *“For He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* So at the cross our sin was placed on Christ and His righteousness was made available to all who will receive it. On one side of the transaction our sin and all the evil consequences of our sin were placed on Jesus; He bore the full penalty for that sin in our behalf--and the other side of the transaction He provides for us His perfect righteousness, as a gift to be received by faith. Our sin came on Him so that His righteousness could come on us.

Isaiah 53:4-6 describes the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross that affected this exchange. *“Surely He has borne our griefs<sup>4</sup>, And carried our sorrows<sup>5</sup>; Yet we esteemed Him stricken. Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions<sup>6</sup>, He was bruised for our iniquities<sup>7</sup>; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* He is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. All the O.T. sacrifices pointed to this one final sacrifice that would deal with the sin issue forever. Once and for all Jesus offered Himself up by the Eternal Spirit unto God for our justification.<sup>8</sup>

Justification is a N.T. word that communicates the legal aspect of our salvation. The wages of sin is death. Rebellion against God must be punished for justice to be maintained. Jesus stepped into your place and endured the punishment so that God could justly forgive you of sin. But something even greater than that happened on the cross: not only was your sin forgiven but Jesus' righteousness was transferred to your account. So in Christ you receive the gift of His righteousness.

Rom. 5:17-19 *“For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.”* So here is the

---

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew: choliy = disease, grief, (is) sick (-ness). (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.) OT:2470.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew: mak'ob = affliction, grief, pain, sorrow. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.) OT:4341.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew: pasha` = rebellion, sin, transgression, trespass. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.) OT:6588.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew: `avon = fault, iniquity, mischief, punishment (of iniquity), sin. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.) OT:5771.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 9:11-14. Rom. 4:25; 5:8-9. The Greek, dikaioo, means “to declare righteous, to set right.” Rom 2:13 (from Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblesoft & Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

exchange: our sin put to Christ's account; his righteousness put to our account.<sup>9</sup> Everything depends upon that transaction.

A couple of years ago, Jeanie and I sold a house in Kansas City and bought a house in Springfield, all on the same day. That was possible through the technology of "wire transfers". Money from the sale of the Kansas City house was transferred by wire to Springfield for the down payment for our home here. I could not see that transaction as it occurred; it happened in the invisible realm. But I received a message from a reliable source telling me the exchange had happened. Based on my faith in that message I moved into my home in Springfield and have lived here ever since.

The message<sup>10</sup> of the cross declares the good news of the transaction that happened at Calvary. We receive that message and enter into a new realm of living.<sup>11</sup> By faith we accept the forgiveness of sin and embrace the free gift of Christ's righteousness. We move into the new realm of living. We enjoy the benefits of the transaction. We rely on the payment Jesus has made. Rom. 5:1 *"Therefore, having been justified by faith (say that with me: justified by faith) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Now as a practical matter how do we enjoy the full benefits of that reality?

(1) We continue to rely upon that exchange as the basis of our confidence in God. We don't frustrate the grace of God by trying to earn favor we already have.<sup>12</sup> We simply operate in that favor as a child of God and go about doing good because we love the Lord and appreciate what He has already done for us.

(2) When we sin, we confess our sin and rely upon the blood of Jesus to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. *"My little children, (1 John 2:1) these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* *"If we confess our sins, (1 John 1:9) He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Live in that reality. He is faithful to forgive—and He is just in doing so because the penalty has been paid.

(3) Reliance on the transaction of the cross will enable you to live above the accusations of the devil. He is the accuser and he will remind you of every failure and shortcoming – unless you know how to appropriate the blood<sup>13</sup> of Christ and receive the free gift of forgiveness. Rom. 8:1 *"There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."* Jesus bore your condemnation. He has given to you His right standing before the Father. That identity in Christ provides the foundation for growing in grace<sup>14</sup> and maturing into the child of God you're called to be.

---

<sup>9</sup> The exchange included our sin for His righteousness, our condemnation for His right standing and acceptance before the Father (Rms. 5:18), our curse for His blessing (Gal. 3:13-14), our poverty for His abundance (2 Cor. 8:9), our sickness for His healing (Isa. 53:4-6 and 1 Pet. 2:24), etc.

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 10:17 (NIV) "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Gal. 2:21. The letter to the Galatians deals with this mistake. It is from faith to faith. We continue our spiritual growth through the same reliance upon Christ and His work that we exercised when we were born into the kingdom.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. 12:10-11.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Pet. 3:18.

So at the cross God exchanged your sin, your shortcomings, your penalty for sin and gave to your account<sup>15</sup> Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' favor and acceptance before the Father, and seated you with Him in the spiritual realm. To the degree we live in reliance upon that reality, to that degree we experience victory and fullness of life.<sup>16</sup> The Provision of the Cross-- 2 Peter 1:3"*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness....*"

II. The PRINCIPLE of the Cross is how God brings us into the fullness of this provision. Jesus said, (Matt. 16:24-25) "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*"

I have talked about faith in the work of Christ at the cross in our behalf 2000 years ago. That is foundational to everything. We have no standing before God without it.

But there is an application of the cross to our daily lives that opens the way for us to experience resurrection power in this life. The cross is essential to real discipleship. If I find a Christianity that denies the words of Jesus in Matt. 16, I have found a counterfeit Christianity. Not only am I to place my faith in the cross Jesus bore 2000 years ago, but I am to take up my cross and follow Him. Now Jesus gives us some explanation about what it means for me to take up my cross. First it means I'm going to have to deny myself. I can't really follow Jesus if I am catering to my selfish nature. If I simply want to use Jesus as a means to get what my flesh wants—I missed the point of it all. Jesus does not come into our lives to bring comfort and success to our old man—He comes to kill the old man! Yes that happened 2000 years ago at the cross—but it's practical out workings in my soul occur as I deny the flesh and follow Jesus. In the cultural context of Matt. 16, the cross was clearly seen as an instrument of execution. The Romans would hang criminals on crosses set along the road for everyone to see. They did this as a warning to not cross them. So when Jesus said "*take up your cross*" they knew He meant an instrument of execution. In verse 17 Jesus embellished upon the explanation further, "*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" So, real Christianity carries a personal cross for every true follower of Christ.

Let me give you the context of Jesus words in Matthew 16. He had begun to tell his disciples about the cross he would bear: the sufferings he would endure. Peter took him aside to correct some of his thinking. "We need a more positive message here. We need a victorious, triumphant king to follow. You need to forget about all this suffering and dying. What we're about is ruling and reigning." Peter was looking for a straight path to power and prominence. A cross did not play into his thinking. How many remember what Jesus did in response to that reasoning? He rebuked Satan who inspired Peter to renounce the cross. "*Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God. Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'*" Do not miss the connection Jesus makes in Matthew 16 of His cross (verse 21) and our cross (verse 24) as a continuation of the principle in the kingdom of God. His kingdom has a cross. The carnal mind does not want it there. Peter wanted it out of the conversation. But it is essential to God's plan; it is essential to the Church's message, and it is essential to the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life. Jesus had to take up His cross if you and I are to be

---

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 4:6-8 (NIV).

<sup>16</sup> Rms. 5:2; Heb. 4:16. Placing our faith in this provision should have been emphasized more in this message. Other verses to consider: Matt. 9:29; Mark 11:22-24; Rom. 1:17; 4:16; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:2; Heb. 11.

saved. You and I have to take up our cross if the Holy Spirit is to bring us out of bondage to the flesh into the glorious liberty God has for us.

Christianity does not work without a personal cross. One reason some people never grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is that they are too busy trying to save their carnal life. They are not willing to deny themselves. They do not understand that in the kingdom of God up is down and down is up.<sup>17</sup> So instead of embracing the cross in their lives, they reject it and live just like the world. And notice that Matt. 16 leaves the choice with the individual. I can take up my cross and follow Jesus or I can live to preserve my carnal life—but I cannot do both.

Do you remember the Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life? By most standards this guy had his act together. But in that conversation he encountered a personal cross; and he had to decide whether to take it up or pass on the opportunity. Jesus said to him, *“You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”* 23 *But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich”* (Luke 18:22-23). That was not a cross he was willing to embrace.

In 2 Tim 4:10 Paul wrote, *“...Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...”* There was a cross that Demas chose to avoid.

In contrast, Paul said in Phil. 3:8 *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Gal. 5:24), And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”* What strikes me in that verse is the action of crucifixion is taken by the person. I don’t just hope and wait that God will crucify my flesh with the affections and lusts. I don’t just pray that God will crucify my flesh with the affections and lusts. By the grace of God, in His strength, I do it. *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*

Paul wrote in Phil. 3:18 *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.”* Notice Paul does not say enemies of Christ; he says “enemies of the CROSS of Christ.” These are people who do not mind taking the name of Christ as long as there is no cross involved. They want a message more palatable to the carnal mind. They do not want a focus on the brutal death of Jesus. They don’t want a focus on sin and its offense to God. And they certainly don’t want a message that calls them personally to a cross. But when you take the cross out of the message of salvation you have no real salvation. And when you take the cross out of your personal life, you reject the principle that enables you to enjoy God’s kind of life<sup>18</sup>. God’s way is death to self and entry into newness of life. Enemies of the cross want a soft, easy Christianity that caters to the flesh. But the flesh is the problem in every one of us and it needs to meet up with a cross.

There was an occasion in John 6 when a whole lot of people thought they wanted to follow Jesus—until He raised the issue of a cross. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the*

---

<sup>17</sup> Luke 18:14; James 4:10; Luke 22:25-26; Phil. 2:8-9.

<sup>18</sup> The eternal life (Greek: zoe) that God offers is not just one that exits forever but is of a certain quality. That quality of righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14:17) flows out of connection with God (John 15). It begins for us when we are born of His incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23). It is enjoyed in our daily lives as we walk in the Spirit (Rms. 8:6; Gal. 5:24-25). I sometimes refer to this as resurrection life or newness of life.

*flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”* On second thought, they decided they did not want to follow Jesus after all. They were looking for something altogether different than what He was offering. They wanted a King who would fulfill the desires of their flesh. He was offering a crucifixion that would bring them into the eternal life of God. Will you have Jesus on His terms or do you insist that He meet your terms. This is a hard saying (John 6:60); but one that must be answered. I want my answer to be “Yes, Jesus, I will follow you on Your terms—cross and all. I will eat your flesh and drink your blood.”

The paradox is this: when I take up the cross in my own life, what needs to die dies and then (and only then) can I begin to really live. Then I can live free of the demands of the carnal nature. That is not a journey that I have completed; but I am on that journey. I understand the value and the potential of the cross in my daily<sup>19</sup> life. That’s why Fanny Crosby wrote, “Jesus keep me near the cross.” Living by faith in the Cross of Christ and walking each day in the application of the cross to our own desires is the pathway to victory. “In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever, Till my raptured soul shall find Rest beyond the river.”

The paradox of taking up my cross is the sweet fellowship of Christ in my daily life. Have you experienced it? You think something is going to destroy you, but you trust God through it. Then you discover in that crucified life—a sweet, sweet presence of Jesus. Something you may have never known had there not been a cross for you. “Must Jesus Bear the Cross alone, and all the world go free. No there’s a cross for everyone and there’s a cross for me.”<sup>20</sup> I will take it up and follow Jesus.

I’ll tell you where you will find your cross. It will always be where His will crosses your will.<sup>21</sup>

Years ago a young girl entered a little Presbyterian Church out of curiosity. There she heard the gospel for the first time and was converted. She later heard God’s call on her life to go to China as a missionary. She was the only daughter of a multi-millionaire. She was socially prominent and wealthy. But her parents were not Christians. When she told them of her decision to go to the mission field, they sneered at the very thought. They were sure that they could quickly put a stop to her passing whim.

This girl was engaged to a successful, prominent businessman—but he was not a Christian either. When she talked with him about giving his life to Christ, he took a stand similar to her parents.

Later on the parents gave a social event and invited their wealthy friends. They told these friends of their daughter’s intentions and enlisted their help to change her mind. During the evening the daughter listened to all their arguments against going to the mission field.

Finally, she walked over to the piano and began to play and sing:

“Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow Thee, destitute, despised, forsaken, Thou from hence my all shall be.”

---

<sup>19</sup> Luke 9:23 “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me” (emphasis mine). The decision to deny oneself and take up our cross is something that must be affirmed in the choices we make each day.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Shepherd, “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?” See

[http://www.invitationtochrist.org/must\\_jesus\\_bear\\_the\\_cross\\_alone.htm](http://www.invitationtochrist.org/must_jesus_bear_the_cross_alone.htm) for a brief history of the song.

<sup>21</sup> John 21:18.

Her fiancé was touched by her action. He walked over to her and said, “I did not know Jesus could mean so much to any person. If He means that much to you, please pray for me that I might know Him as well.”

They were married and BOTH went to China. They labored there for many years.<sup>22</sup>

Paul wrote 2 Cor 13:4 “*For though He (Jesus) was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.*” So here is the principle of the cross: by death, comes resurrection life. By dying to self, one can really live. By being crucified in weakness, one is raised up by God in His power. People want the power of God, but without a cross it would be a terrible thing. Uncrucified flesh will always misuse the power of God—it will misuse any power for its own selfish end. Crucifixion is the prelude to resurrection.

Gal. 2:20 “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*” (KJV). I first must recognize the exchange that occurred 2000 years ago on the cross. On that cross I was crucified with Christ. Therefore, I am no longer obligated to live according to the demands of my flesh. I am dead to that. The old me was killed on the tree. Crucified with Christ is a reality that occurred 2000 years ago<sup>23</sup>—but it is also a reality that I live out today as I take up my cross and follow Jesus. I’m dead to one reality, but through that death I have entered into a greater reality. Christ lives in me. He expresses His life through me as I deny myself and follow His unction.

There is a life of power and victory available to every Christian. But the pathway to that power is crucifixion—taking up my cross and following Him. Paradoxically the crucified life is the way to the abundant life Jesus came to give you. We live in that, we enjoy the benefits of that as we rely on the Provision of Christ’s cross and as we embrace the Principle of the cross in our daily lives. Will you come after Him on His terms?

---

<sup>22</sup> I do not remember my source for this story. The song, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” was written by Henry F. Lyte. Addition verses can be found at <http://www.hymnpod.com/2009/05/20/jesus-i-my-cross-have-taken/>.

<sup>23</sup> Rms. 6:3-6, 11.