

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-28-15 PM NOTES
"TAKE UP YOUR CROSS TO FOLLOW JESUS"
MARK 8:34
#3 in Series, "Following Jesus"

"There was a day when I died. [I] died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." —George Mueller

1 Corinthians 15:31b (NKJV) "...I die daily."

"We have put the demands of discipleship in fine print for fear that we will scare off the prospects." —Vance Havner

"I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted [to expose to public scorn] as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference." —Dorothy Sayers

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV) "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

I. The Meaning of *Taking up Your Cross*

Matthew 10:38 (NKJV) "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) "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.'"

Luke 9:23 (NKJV) "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.'"

A. *Taking up Our Cross* Is a Willingness to Suffer and Die

B. *Taking up Our Cross* Involves Reckoning on the Results of Christ's Cross

Romans 6:6 (NKJV) "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."

Romans 6:11 (NKJV) "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 4:5 (NKJV) “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

Romans 6:5 (NKJV) “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His resurrection.*”

Hebrews 4:2b (NKJV) “...the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it.*”

Romans 6:12 (NKJV) “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.”

*Dying with Jesus by death reckoned mine;
Living with Jesus a new life divine;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.*
—Daniel Whittle (1893)

II. The Motive for *Taking up Your Cross*

A. *Taking up Your Cross* Evidences His Value to You

“If you follow Jesus only because He makes life easy now, it will look to the world as though you really love what they love, and Jesus just happens to provide it for you. But if you suffer with Jesus in the pathway of love because He is your supreme treasure, then it will be apparent to the world that your heart is set on a different fortune than theirs. This is why Jesus demands that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him.” —John Piper

B. *Taking up Your Cross* Gives You a Proper Perspective

Romans 8:18 (NKJV) “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

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There are more than 250 references to disciples or discipleship in the Gospels. We are not called to simply lead people to a decision for Christ; we are called, commanded, and commissioned to lead people to become disciples. It is wholly surrendered disciples who are going to change the world, not those who

have tried to tack Jesus onto their life and give Him “a place”. The simplest definition of a disciple is a person who follows Jesus. In Mark 8:34 we see a progression leading up to following Jesus. Becoming a disciple involves first a desire to follow Him. We saw that this is not speaking of a preference, but a strong consuming longing to follow Jesus. No one will become a Christ Follower until there is a desire in their heart. We saw that God is the source of that desire, but once we become a Christ follower, we cultivate that desire, intensify that desire to follow Him by getting the “appetite destroyers” out of our life, and putting “appetite enhancers” in our daily routines. Sin that is tolerated destroys our appetite for following Jesus. But appetite destroyers are not necessarily evil or sinful things; they can be good things that take an inordinate amount of our time and keep us from the best things. Appetite destroyers can be hobbies, TV, times with friends, and other things that simply suck up all of our time leaving little or no time for the best things. Appetite enhancers are the spiritual disciplines (intake of the Word, prayer, meditation on the Word), reading good books such as biographies of the heroes of the faith. The next part of that progression in following Jesus is denying self. In the last message, we saw that the self life is the same as waking after the flesh. Denying self is basically the same as crucifying the flesh or making a total surrender to the Lordship of Christ. One of the clearest descriptions of denying self is found in this testimony of George Mueller – the great man of faith who lived 1805-1898. Mueller was asked the secret of his supernatural life in Christ. He said, “There was a day when I died.” As he spoke he bent lower until he almost touched the floor. He said, “[I] died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.” [“Spirit of Revival” Page 21]. It was probably this denying self that Paul was referring to when he said in **1 Corinthians 15:31 (NKJV)** “...I die daily.” The daily death is death to self – death to a self centered self led, self empowered life.

Today, we come to the third part of that progression to following Christ. After the desire and denying self, we are to take up our cross. All too often, preachers and teachers seem intent on softening what Jesus said about being his disciple. Vance Havner said, “We have put the demands of discipleship in fine print for fear that we will scare off the prospects.” Much of what is called Christianity today has ignored the hard things Jesus said and has perverted biblical Christianity into a way to have health, wealth, and prosperity and “Your Best Life Now”. I believe that Dorothy Sayers was correct when she said, “I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted [to expose to public scorn] as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference.” [Quoted in John MacArthur, “The Jesus You Can’t Ignore”, Page 163]. Oh, how much of modern “Christianity” has perverted what Jesus said about being His disciple. Jesus didn’t pull a “bait and switch” by telling us to come to Him and have your best life now and get rich and never really go through suffering, and then once we have signed on to follow Him He says, “Whoops, I forget to tell you that following me involves taking up your cross, dying daily, and being persecuted.” He tells us up front the demands of discipleship – the demands of following Him. Following Him involves taking up our cross. In fact, the cross is the focal point of all of God’s dealings with mankind. We must never forget the centrality of the cross in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. I want to warn you that the centrality of the cross is not popular with the world. The world says “Give us something relevant; give us something useful.” **1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV)** says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Because the cross is the power of God, we are to keep it central in all that we do.

I. The Meaning of Taking Up Your Cross

There are numerous references in Scripture to taking up our cross. **Matthew 10:38 (NKJV)** “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” **Matthew 16:24 (NKJV)** “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.’” **Luke 9:23 (NKJV)** “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.’” Let me remind you of what taking up our cross is not referring to. Some misunderstand the meaning of the cross and believe that it is a tough circumstance we have to go through. For example, “This bad back is just the cross I have to bear” or “My husband is my cross in life”. No! The cross does not refer to some unavoidable pain or circumstance; it is something we choose to bear. On this side of Calvary, there are two applications to taking up our cross.

A. Taking Up Our Cross Is a Willingness to Suffer and Die

The cross in the Biblical context is always associated with suffering and death! The cross was not a burden; it was an instrument of suffering and death. Crosses were not used for decoration, jewelry, or furniture; they were used for causing suffering and death. The picture of taking up our cross is a condemned person taking up his own cross carrying it to the place of his execution. That was the Roman custom. In the first century, the cross was universally looked on as an instrument of shame, torture and death and was therefore looked on with contempt. Jesus is saying that His disciples must identify with what the world counts as shame. The cross comes as the result of walking in His steps in the same world that crucified him. The cross is uniquely related to our choosing to follow Christ. To take up our cross is to have done some serious counting of the cost and having settled the fact that we are going to follow Christ whatever the cost. To take up your cross is to confess that by God’s enabling you are accepting the suffering, the pain, the rejection, the persecution that comes with following Christ. We realize that our pain will be as nothing compared to His, but it is our asserting that whatever happens, we trust Him and we have already settled the fact that we are willing to pay the price. When we find that following him involves a great sacrifice, we don’t have to debate, agonize, or vacillate; we have already taken up our cross – in fact we do it daily.

Today in America, we tend to spiritualize the suffering and death that the cross magnifies. We know that church history is filled with people who chose physical death rather than deny Christ, but in America we tend to say, “Well that’s way back there in history. It doesn’t literally happen today.” Allow me to give you a statistic. More Christians have been martyred in the last 100 years than in all the previous 1900 years put together. Thousands of our missionaries bear their cross daily as they lay their lives on the line for Christ and the gospel. We have brothers and sisters in West Africa who daily face suffering and death (literal physical suffering; not being laughed at, but being killed). I know a Pastor that I talked with, saw his church, and heard his plans to build a larger place to meet. Later, after we came back to “safe America” he was killed for being a Christian. You may be thinking, “That would never happen here in America”. Are you sure? Our culture is turning increasingly against biblical Christianity. Do not think that it could not happen here. When Jesus talks about taking up our cross, the primary reference is physical suffering and death, but we realize that there is suffering that falls under “take up our cross” that does not involve physical death. It may be that we risk the death of relationships, the death of our reputation, the death of job promotions, the death of a comfortable life for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

B. Taking Up Our Cross Involves Reckoning on the Results of Christ’s Cross

On this side of His cross and with the benefit of the rest of the New Testament we glean even more meaning out of taking up our cross. When we understand the full meaning of the cross, we realize that the cross at Calvary was not just Jesus’ cross; it was also our cross. Not only did Jesus die on the cross for our sins, in a very real sense, we died with Him! **Romans 6:6 (NKJV)** “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.” Taking up our cross means that we reckon on the fact that the old us in Adam that was enslaved to and under the dominion of sin was crucified with Jesus and thus sin no longer has dominion or authority over us; we have been set free from sin’s slavery. To take up my cross means that I am by faith ready to enforce what the cross of Christ accomplished. That’s what Romans 6:11 means: **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I take up my cross when I by faith reckon on the fact that my old Adamic nature has been crucified

and I am no longer in bondage to the pull and power of sin and that I am free to follow Jesus without reservation. We are told in Luke 9:23 that we take up our cross **daily**. The old me was only crucified with Christ once but I reckon on it daily; I enforce what was accomplished on the cross daily.

Let's focus on that word "reckon". In some ways, this is one of the most important words in the whole Bible. Reckoning is the tool God uses to turn information into transformation. The Christian who doesn't reckon is like a beggar who has access to an account with millions in it and keeps on begging. One of the keys then following Jesus is reckoning. The Greek word is "Logizomai". This word, or a form of this word, is used 41 times in the New Testament and 19 times in the book of Romans. It is translated several different ways, even in the same translation. It is translated "consider", "count", "accounted", or "impute". Basically, "reckon" has to do with reality – the way things really are. It is an acknowledgement of or an acting on something that is already true or has already happened. In bookkeeping, it involves posting in a ledger an amount corresponding to what actually exists. If I "reckon" in my checkbook that I have \$100, then I had better have a \$100 or else it is not true reckoning; it is deceit. It may help us to see how this same word is used elsewhere in Romans. The most common occurrence of the word is in Romans 4 where it is used 11 times. It is used to show that our sins were reckoned to Christ on the cross and His righteousness is reckoned to us when we come in repentance and faith to Him. Look at an example in **Romans 4:5 (NKJV)** "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness". That word "accounted" is "logizomai". It could be translated "reckoned". Faith results in righteousness being posted to our account (Christ's righteousness). Our reckoning on what God says is true does not make it true; we reckon on it because it is true because God said it is true. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones translates this phrase in verse 11, "Consider and keep constantly before you this truth about yourself". To reckon is really just responding with faith to what God says is true.

What is the fact that we are reckoning on? **Romans 6:11b (NKJV)** "...reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin..." We don't reckon sin to be dead. We reckon the old us in Adam that sin had dominion over as being dead. Why? Is it because we feel dead? No, it is because God says that we are dead to sin because the old us in Adam was crucified with Christ. To take up our cross is to make that union with Christ real in our experience. Faith elevates God's word above our feelings. The Bible teacher Ruth Paxon said, "Sin need have no more power over the believer than he grants it through unbelief." I take up my cross when I reckon that the old me that sin held as its slave is now dead, crucified with Christ. **Romans 6:5 (NKJV)** "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His resurrection*". There must be a reckoning.

Romans 6:12 is the logical response to verse Romans 6:11. **Romans 6:12 (NKJV)** "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." In other words, if God has made this amazing provision for us to walk in victory over sin by taking up our cross, why would anyone let sin reign in their mortal body and obey its lusts?

The cross is about death and you cannot follow Jesus and be His disciple until you enforce in your daily life your death on the cross with Him.

II. The Motive for Taking Up Your Cross

There is obviously urgency about taking up your cross. Why is it so urgent?

A. Taking Up Your Cross Evidences His Value to You

Your willingness to suffer and even die for Him evidences the fact that He is more valuable to you than earthly rewards or even your physical life. This is not optional; it is an absolute necessity if you would follow Jesus. John Piper states it well: "If you follow Jesus only because He makes life easy now, it will look to the world as though you really love what they love, and Jesus just happens to provide it for you. But if you suffer with Jesus in the pathway of love because He is your supreme treasure, then it will be apparent to the world that your heart is set on a different fortune than theirs. This is why Jesus demands that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him." [John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, page 71].

B. Taking Up Your Cross Gives You a Proper Perspective

We are here on this earth for a few decades at best. We are in eternity forever. The call to take up our cross is only for our few decades here. The reward of having suffered for His glory and to evidence His supreme value will bear rewards for eternity. In other words suffering is temporary, but pleasure in Jesus is eternal. **Romans 8:18 (NKJV)** “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

CONCLUSION

Let me introduce you to someone from church history that most probably haven't heard of. His name is Raymond Lull. He was born on an island off the coast of Spain in 1235. After a wild sinful life as a youth, he came to Christ. He became a missionary to the Muslims in North Africa. After some time of missionary service, he came back home as a professor of Arabic until he was 79. Instead of passing his last days in comfort and ease, Lull decided to go back to North Africa. He said, “Men are wont to die, O Lord, from old age, the failure of natural warmth and excess of cold; but thus, if it be Thy will, Thy servant would not wish to die; he would prefer to die in the glow of love, even as Thou wast willing to die for him.” Back to North Africa Lull went in the twilight of his life. He found the little band of believers he had led to Christ when there earlier. For a year in what is today Algeria, he labored secretly among a little circle of converts that he had led to Christ. After a while he became weary of living in secret and came to the open market and presented himself as the man they had once expelled from their town. He then began to preach what we would call today a “hell-fire and brimstone message”. Even in proclaiming the wrath of God, he pleaded as a man filled with the love. Soon the Muslim populace was whipped into a frenzy being unable to reply to his arguments and dragged Lull out of town and stoned him to death on June 30, 1315. At 80 years of age he forfeited his physical life getting the gospel to the unreached. To most professing Christians, that seems strange, but when you have an eternal perspective, it makes perfect sense. Raymond Lull lost his life for Christ's sake and if you could talk to him today, he would say, “Yes I lost my physical life for Christ's sake, but I have eternal life that never ends”. For Raymond Lull, physical death was a reward; it was gain [facts taken from John Piper booklet, “Rethinking Retirement”, Pages 6-8].