

Pentecost 17
September 16, 2018

Mark 8:27-35
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No Cross – No Christian

- I. There's no Christianity without Jesus and His cross.
- II. There's no being a Christian without carrying your own cross.

Dear Christian friends,

Can you honestly think of **anything** BETTER than being a Christian? Just a few verses after these Jesus asks that HAUNTING question, ***“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?”***

Just look what we ALL HAVE as Christians! We have **God's own Son** as our PERSONAL SAVIOR. In Jesus we have God's forgiveness of all our sins – peace with God – a **whole new** GOOD relationship with God – we're going straight to heaven when we die – we will live forever with God in that ***“new heaven and new earth, where God will make everything new.”*** IN THE MEANTIME we have God's Word to **guide** us – the comfort of God's **promises** – the privilege and power of **prayer**. God wants us SO SURE of **all this** that He NOT ONLY repeatedly tells us so in His Word He also repeatedly does this MIRACLE we call Holy Communion. With simple bread and wine Jesus actually gives us the VERY SAME body and blood He gave into death on the cross ***“for the forgiveness”*** of all our sins. ***“Here's the PROOF,”*** Jesus tells us, ***“Take eat, take drink!”*** WHAT GRACE! What a GOD we Christians have!

We have all those blessings all because of that – the **cross!** GET RID of the cross and you **get rid** of Christianity and **all** its blessings. That's Jesus' point here – NO CROSS – NO CHRISTIAN. 1)There's no Christianity without Jesus and His cross. 2)There's no being a Christian without **carrying** your own cross.

I. There's no Christianity without Jesus and His cross.

Jesus and the apostles were in the area of ***“Caesarea Philippi”*** in the far north of the Holy Land. ***“On the way Jesus asked His disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”*** Jesus didn't ask that for HIS OWN information but to help teach the apostles. ***“They told Him, ‘John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others say one of the prophets.’”*** The people recognized Jesus as being someone SPECIAL and IMPORTANT. Those were good answers but NOT GOOD ENOUGH. Admiring Jesus is **not the same** as trusting in Jesus. A Jesus who IS ONLY a **good man** is not the Jesus the BIBLE REVEALS **nor** the Jesus we need.

“But who do you say I am?’ Peter answered Him, ‘You are the Christ’” - or as Matthew reports it, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

That is the Jesus REVEALED in the Bible. The man ***“Jesus of Nazareth”*** is the eternal Son of God IN THE FLESH. Jesus is our almighty Creator born our **flesh-and-blood** Brother. He is ***“Immanuel”*** – God Himself with us. GET RID of that **truth** and you get rid of – you destroy! - the Christian faith.

With His true identity clear to the apostles Jesus ***“began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again. He was speaking plainly to them.”***

Peter can't believe what he's hearing. It's PREPOSTEROUS. ***“The Christ, the Son of the living God – suffering many things – rejected – killed.”*** Peter is so shocked he didn't hear Jesus add, ***“and after three days rise again.”*** ***“Suffer – rejected – killed”?*** NO WAY! He's the ***“Messiah”*** – the mighty CONQUEROR – the glorious DELIVERER. You don't conquer by GOING DOWN in **defeat**.

You don't crush your enemies by BEING CRUCIFIED. ***"Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him."***

But what Peter saw as NONSENSE was in fact a DIVINE NECESSITY. Jesus ***"MUST suffer – be killed – rise again."*** Despite his GOOD INTENTIONS Peter was actually serving the DEVIL'S PURPOSES. Through Peter the devil was once again tempting Jesus to AVOID the cross. Peter didn't understand it but the DEVIL DID. There is no Christianity WITHOUT Jesus and His cross.

The disciples needed to be clear ABOUT HOW Jesus is our Savior. Jesus doesn't save us **by being** an EXAMPLE for us. We could never live up to Jesus' example! Jesus doesn't save us by **getting us** a SECOND CHANCE with God. We'd blow any chances we're given. Jesus saves us by being our SUBSTITUTE – by taking our place under God's law and taking care of **everything** to save us.

God's law demands TWO THINGS from **each one** of us – perfect obedience all the time and the punishment of any disobedience. BEFORE DYING on the cross Jesus lived for us that life of **perfect love** and **obedience** that we owed God. Throughout His whole life Jesus perfectly obeyed every commandment in **every way**. THEN Jesus went to His cross to be punished for every single sin of every single person. **On the cross** Jesus endured the hell we had coming – he died the death that ***"takes away the sin of the world."*** But Jesus' death was NOT HIS DEFEAT but **the devil's!** AS PROMISED three days later Jesus **rose triumphant** from the dead. We dare never separate Good Friday from Easter Sunday. We NEED BOTH Jesus' **bloody cross** and His **empty grave**.

Jesus ***"MUST"*** do that for us. SUCH is the love God has for us. Rather than giving up on us in our **sin** and **rebellion** God graciously gave us His ***"beloved Son"*** to be our perfect Savior. There is no Christianity WITHOUT Jesus and His cross – but WITH Jesus and His cross we have forgiveness – **peace** with God – **eternal life** in heaven and all those blessings I mentioned before.

Peter was shocked by **Jesus talking** about His cross. Jesus has more SHOCKING NEWS for Peter – and for all who **would be** Christians. It's true – NO CROSS – **no Christian**. There's no Christianity **without Jesus** and His cross AND...

II. There's no being a Christian without carrying your own cross.

Jesus wants everyone to hear and UNDERSTAND this. ***"Jesus called the crowd and His disciples together and said to them, 'If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.'"***

Now **there is** a WORLD OF DIFFERENCE between Jesus' cross and our crosses. ONLY Jesus' cross **saves** us. **Our crosses** don't add anything to what **Jesus** has already done for us. **Our crosses** don't make us Christians – they come as a result – a CONSEQUENCE – of our **being Christians**. It's true – NO CROSS – **no Christian**. There's no being a Christian WITHOUT Jesus' cross AND our carrying our **own personal** crosses. Jesus doesn't force anyone **to be** a Christian but you can't be a Christian WITHOUT DOING what Jesus says here.

"If anyone wants to follow Me" – to be a Christian – ***"let him deny himself."*** Think of Peter ***"denying"*** Jesus – protesting ANY CONNECTION with Jesus – swearing that he ***"didn't know"*** Jesus and didn't want ANYTHING TO DO with Jesus. That's exactly what we are to do TO OURSELVES! When our sinful nature starts acting up – and that happens EVERY DAY, right? – we are to ***"deny"*** – have nothing to do with it. When the sinful nature tempts you to **this – that – whatever** sin – don't CATER to it - refuse to even listen to it. When the sinful nature pesters you to **ignore** and **defy** God don't even give it the **time of day**. Oh, it's not easy doing that! This sinful nature won't take no for an answer. The sinful nature can be so stubborn and persistent but Jesus doesn't give us any WIGGLE ROOM. Jesus doesn't make ANY EXCEPTIONS – ***"If you give in after three or four times that's understandable."*** Nobody can live IN DEFIANCE of God and still be a Christian. That person is only

fooling himself. ***“If anyone”*** – whoever he/she may be – ***“would come after Me, let him deny himself.”***

“Let him ...take up his cross.” Luke has ***“take up his cross DAILY.”*** This isn't a ONCE AND DONE deal but a day after day – EVERY day – ALL THROUGH the day ***“taking up”*** your cross. The ***“cross”*** is not simply the pains and problems – the **hardships** and hassles – of life that EVEN UNBELIEVERS have to endure. The ***“cross”*** is whatever hurt or hardship **comes our way** JUST BECAUSE we **are Christians**. IT can be the ridicule and **snide remarks** we get when we STAND UP for what God says and don't go along with the world's **wicked ways**. It can be that daily battle not to give in to some PET SIN. It can be the hurt of being SHUNNED – being called judgmental and **loveless** – for trying to live a GOD-PLEASING – God-**centered** life. The cross varies from person to person – even during a person's life. We don't get to PICK our crosses. The cross is NO PICNIC. It was meant to torture – to INFLICT MAXIMUM pain and **kill**. Jesus is bluntly telling us it WON'T BE EASY to be and live as a Christian in a world that hates God's Word and will. **Once again** Jesus doesn't give us any WIGGLE ROOM. He doesn't make any EXCEPTIONS. There's no being a Christian without carrying your cross.

“And follow Me.” That's another TOUGH one! We don't lead with JESUS FOLLOWING and **cleaning up** after us. We don't tell Jesus, “THIS IS HOW we're going to do things” and Jesus better accept that. JESUS LEADS – we ***“follow.”*** Jesus decides WHAT we are **to believe**. Jesus decides HOW we are **to live** our daily lives. Jesus determines our MORALS – our priorities in life – our **attitude**. **Again**, Jesus doesn't give us any WIGGLE ROOM. He doesn't make any EXCEPTIONS – “OK, you can lead for a while.” To refuse to ***“follow”*** Jesus means you're not a Christian.

Are you beginning to wonder if you EVEN ARE a Christian? Can you see plenty of times when instead of ***“denying yourself”*** you gave in to your sinful nature – **times** when you refused to ***“carry”*** your cross and endure its **pain** and **rejection** – times you demand Jesus follow your lead? AS CHRISTIANS we daily fall short and sin. **As Christians** that bothers and **bugs** us. **As Christians** we can't just shrug that off. **As Christians** we know what to do with all our sins. **As Christians** we don't deny them or make excuses for them. **As Christians** we take them all to Jesus and find cleansing and comfort at His cross. **As Christians** we CLING to Jesus and His cross for forgiveness - peace with God – eternal life in heaven and all those other blessings. That's why being a **Christian** – HAVING Jesus and His cross – is the greatest thing in the world. Amen.

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