

God's Kingdom Comes Through Death

We follow Christ into death In death we find Christ

When you decide to buy a house there are many costs to consider. The mortgage and monthly payments are a part of the cost, but there are others. Some of them include the time and work to clean and maintain the house, the taxes and insurance, the yard work etc. Yet despite the costs most of you would probably agree it was worth it to own your home.

In our text Jesus speaks about the cost of following Him, the cost of discipleship, and make no mistake the cost is high. He says that whoever will not bear his cross can not be his disciple.

When Jesus talks about “bearing his cross,” he is speaking symbolically but not in the way that we usually use it. When we talk about “bearing crosses” we use it to speak about little problems, sufferings, injustices in our life. We might hear someone say, “My wife is always bossing me around, that is my cross to bear.”

There is some truth to this idea that what we suffer is part of our cross to bear, and we are going to come back to that. But when Jesus speaks about cross he is looking towards death. He is speaking of nothing less than DEATH. Not metaphorical death, not “I’m so embarrassed I’m going to die,” but actual real physical death. The cross was an instrument of death, and when Jesus says to “bear his cross and after Me,” He is telling us to bear, carry, accept death, our death, and even walk willing towards it.

Through Paul the Holy Spirit speaks more about this in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 4:8-11 ⁸ *We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;* ⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--* ¹⁰ *always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.* ¹¹

If we would follow Jesus, we must follow him even to the cross, even into death. That is where Jesus is headed. If we would follow Him we must bear our cross, bear death, accept that it is a part of our life.

So then the natural question is why? Why would we want to follow Jesus into death? Why would we want to be like Paul, hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, forsaken, carrying around death?

Paul answers that question two verses earlier

2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶ For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The cross is the price, the cost. The *reward* is the free gift of God. The goal is the kingdom, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.

It is only through death that we can gain the prize. Through the death of Jesus we receive the forgiveness. Through our death we gain the kingdom.

Understand the cost is death, but look for the prize of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The Cross is God's Plan

Luke 14:25-35 ²⁵ Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,

If you are going to follow someone it might be worthwhile to know where he is going.

Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. When he gets there, he is going to die. On the road huge crowds are following him. But what those people don't understand is where they are going. They do not realize that following Jesus means death. Jesus wants them to be aware of their destination.

I don't know how many of you have seen or heard about this new "tiny homes" fad. It's apparently the thing to do now, to build or buy the smallest house possible. There are a lot of YouTube videos and Instagram accounts talking about it. It's like people are competing to see who can live in the smallest house possible.

The other day I ran across a YouTube video "Five HUGE lies about tiny homes." This realtor was discussing some of the unforeseen costs of a tiny home. For example, it's often way more expensive to replace appliances because they must be custom built. She wasn't saying don't do it, she was saying understand what downsides are, count the costs.

Like the tiny home fad now, following Jesus was the thing to do then. Everyone was doing it. After all you get to see miracles, Jesus gives you bread and fish etc. But just like tiny homes there are hidden costs, Jesus wants us to be aware of what is coming.

The cost is death and the cross.

This is a cost the Jews were not willing to pay. It is the one cost that they were unwilling to pay.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:23 ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness

And remember what they shouted when Jesus was dying

Mark 15:31-32 ³¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. ³² "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

Death is the one thing that the Jews would not accept from Jesus as their savior. They were willing to accept Jesus as their Savior, but not if He was going to die. They were not willing to accept death as part of God's plan to save them and us.

Nothing has changed. The refusal to accept death and all that goes with it, disease, suffering, pain, injustice etc as part of God's plan for us is the number one reason why people turn away from God.

How many times have you heard someone say, "If God were loving, He would not allow this or that bad thing to happen?" Or something to that effect?

What people are really saying when they say things like this is that they are willing to follow Jesus but they are not willing to follow him to the cross. They are not willing to accept death as a part of God's plan.

Yet this was God's plan for Jesus and for us. If we would follow Jesus we must understand that this is part of God's plan for us. Jesus makes that very clear in the next verse.

²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

The cost of discipleship is the loss of everything, father, mother, spouse, children, land, money and all our possessions, ultimately even our own life. Before we can gain the kingdom, we must lose it all. Jesus doesn't say maybe. He doesn't say possibly. Jesus says you will lose it all. Jesus would have us consider the cost now, whether we are willing to pay it, rather than to start to follow him and when we have lost some to turn back

Paul reminds us:

Acts 14:22 "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.

This passage seems odd at first because this is Paul's pep talk. This is how Paul encourages the believers. Cheer up guys there is plenty of tribulation for everyone.

On the face of it, this doesn't sound like a great pep talk. It doesn't seem very encouraging.

But it is encouraging. Because many of us are going through tribulations and it feels like Jesus has abandoned us. But Paul reminds us no you are on the right path, you are following Jesus. You are walking with Him.

The path of Christ is the path of the cross. When we walk through tribulation it is not a sign that God has abandoned us but rather that we are getting closer to the goal, the kingdom that Christ has waiting for us.

27 "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Why? Why does Jesus insist that we carry our cross, that we follow Him into death? Why can't we just sit on the hill and watch Jesus die for our sins. He already suffer for us why do we need to suffer too?

Paul had that same question:

2 Corinthians 12:7-8 ⁷ **And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.** ⁸ **Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.**

He pleaded with God to remove this cross. But God's response was that bearing this cross was necessary.

Sometimes people might say that God gives us cross to make us stronger. Whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger. But that is not what the Holy Spirit says in 2 Corinthians. Paul isn't stronger he is weaker. But how does this passage continue:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ⁹ **And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** ¹⁰ **Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

It didn't make Paul stronger, it made him weaker but, in his weakness, he learned to put his trust in Jesus. Our suffering is not there to make us strong but to teach us our weakness so that we learn to trust in Christ's strength.

A popular hymn reminds us:

"hold thou the cross before my closing eyes."

This is our petition, this is what we are praying God for. As we get closer to death, more and more it is the cross of Christ and the empty tomb and the glory that will follow that shines clearly before our eyes. We get weaker and learn to trust in Christ's strength. When we are young, we have so much it is easy to get distracted, as we get older as we near death we lose more and more, the darkness closes in, yet there at the center is Christ

I can't tell you how many times I have visited people who are near death, and they can't remember anything else. They can't remember their kids. But they remember Psalm 23. They remember the Lord's prayer. They remember Jesus Christ. All is gone but there is Christ.

It is through this darkness that we enter the kingdom. Every day our lives grow darker is one day closer to the glory of Christ's eternal life.

The cost is high, when we follow Jesus, we follow him into His death and ours. There will be tribulation. But the light of Christ's resurrection is far greater than darkness of death. We bear death because through death we receive the kingdom. Amen