



Peninsula City Church

Easter: Good Friday

Take Up Your Cross

Michael Podhaczky

2nd April 2021 AM Service

Contents

Take Up Your Cross3
 Introduction.....3
1. Jesus took up His cross and was crucified on it3
2. We are to take up our cross5
Some Concluding Thoughts.....7

Take Up Your Cross

Introduction

Q. Why do you think the cross is so central to our life as Christ-followers?

For a long time, it has been popular for people to wear a cross. It became a popular piece of jewellery for many people, Christ-follower or not. It has been said that,

“Though cross necklaces have been around since the Roman Empire was Christianised, recently, crucifixes have become popular tropes (images) among jewellers like New Top Jewellery and Instagram-popular brands like Bagatiba and Vanessa Mooney; for fashion's sake.”¹

But why would someone wear a symbol of torture and torment, especially as jewellery? Many who wear the cross would not be able to answer this question. Instead, they might say that they like it simply as an accessory, or some might wear it as a statement of their belief, where others might not even know why they wear it.

What about us as Christ-followers? What do we think about the cross? Is it just a piece of jewellery? We most likely hold to the idea as being central to us and our faith, but why? Well, we know that Jesus was killed on a cross as a form of Roman execution. But does it merely stop there, or could there be more to it? If we were to evaluate why we think that the cross is so central to our life as Christ-followers, what could we conclude from it? Here we will briefly look at two matters to think about on this issue. These are that Jesus took up His cross and was crucified on it and that He instructed His followers to take up their cross. But what does this mean?

1. Jesus took up His cross and was crucified on it

Q. Why did He take up His cross if He knew that he would die on it?

If we are talking about more than a piece of jewellery, then it is the Bible, which gives us greater insight. The cross was a form of capital punishment used by Rome. They would publicly crucify people for their crimes. In doing so, it was meant to be a deterrent to others to rebel against Rome. The system of crucifixion was cruel and said to be extremely painful and degrading.

We will review what Matthew has to say on the matter in his account of the life of Jesus and especially His death on the cross. In his account, Matthew recorded that Jesus foretold His followers of His death. Jesus tried to prepare His followers for what was coming His way, but they just could not understand what He was getting at. That is,

²¹ “From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. ²² Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke (Lit. *to show honour to* or *to raise the price of*) Him, saying, ‘God forbid it (Lit. [*God be*] *merciful to You*), Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block (i.e., scandal) to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests (Lit. *the things of God*), but humans” (Matt 16:21-23 NASB).

²² “And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered (or *betrayed*) into the hands of men; ²³ and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.’ And they were deeply grieved” (Matt 17:22-23 NASB).

¹ “Is Wearing Cross Jewellery Appreciation Or Appropriation? Let’s Discuss?” <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/wearing-cross-jewelry-appreciation-appropriation-190000816.html> (25th March 2021).

¹⁷ “As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matt 20:17-19 NASB).

¹ “When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, ² ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion” (Matt 26:1-2 NASB).

Matthew also recorded how Israel's religious leaders cried out for His crucifixion and stirred up the crowd. That is,

²² “Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said, “Crucify Him (Lit. *Let Him be crucified!*)” ²³ And he said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they kept shouting all the more, saying, ‘Crucify Him (Lit. *Let Him be crucified!*)’ ²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.’ ²⁵ And all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’ ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified” (Matt 27:22-26 NASB).

Then Jesus was led away and crucified by the Romans,

“And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him and led Him away to crucify Him” (Matt 27:31 NASB).

He was forced to take up His cross and carry it to be killed on it. However, a person named Simon was forced to take up Jesus’ cross and carry it to the place of the skull. That is,

“And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross” (Matt 27:32 NASB).

When they all arrive at Golgotha, the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross crucifying Him.

“And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots” (Matt 27:35 NASB).

When it was about three in the afternoon, Jesus died due to Him being crucified.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit” (Matt 27:50 NASB).

So, Matthew recorded how Jesus had foretold His followers of His death. He had told them that He would be crucified. It was a significant event, which took place. Jesus’ crucifixion has changed the course of history. However, this was why He had come to the earth at this time in history. As Matthew recorded in the first chapter of his account,

“And she (Mary) will bear a Son; and you (Joseph) shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21 NASB).

However, is that all that the cross was about, Jesus’ death? Does it all end there for Christ-followers, or is there more to the idea of the cross? Well, as Christ-followers, we know it does not end there. Jesus Christ went on to tell His own that we are to take up our cross.

2. We are to take up our cross

Q. Why do we need to take up a cross?

We saw that the first time that Matthew recorded Jesus mentioning His death was in chapter 16. He recorded Jesus telling His own who were with Him that He would be killed. It would be through crucifixion, but they did not know that at the time.

“From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt 16:21 NASB).

It set the context for what Jesus would next say to His own. That is that they were to take up their own cross. What a weird to say to those who you love. I do not know about you, but if I were one of the followers of Jesus who hear this, I would not have understood what He meant. However, I would not want to go through crucifixion like Jesus, no way known physically. It was a torturous death where the victim would slowly die in agony. It was an execution system that a depraved mind had thought up this cruel and brutal death. How anyone could anyone in their own mind invent such a disgusting thing to do to another person is beyond comprehension. Yet, they did, and Jesus experienced the full force of it.

Then, strangely enough, Jesus went on to tell His own to take up their cross. What does this mean, though? Well, Jesus gave three commands to His followers at this time. That is,

²⁴ “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me (or *become My follower*), they must deny themselves (once and for all), and (*must*) take up their cross (once and for all) and (*must continually*) follow Me” (Matt 16:24 NASB).

Wow, really, now that’s some positive talk for a great life, not. For many, a Christ-follower, this is the perspective of an upside-down Kingdom. However, it is the right way up to view things. It is the Kingdom of God view of things.

Firstly, he explained what it would look like to deny oneself, take up their cross, and follow Him. To see things from God’s perspective. That is to say,

²⁵ “For whoever wishes to save their life (or soul) will lose it, but whoever loses (destroys, abolishes or renders useless) their life (soul) for My sake will find it.²⁶ For what will it profit a person if they gain the whole world and forfeits their soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every person according to their deeds (Lit. *doing*).²⁸ Truly (*Amen*) I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom” (Matt 16:25-28 NASB).

So, putting this into practice means dying to our self-centred, pride-filled me as king of my life. One of the commands to do this is weird, i.e., that we must take up our cross. Why on earth would we ever want to take up our cross and carry it to our own crucifixion? That is just ridiculous. Really, this is what we are to do? We just need to be like Jesus, don’t we and be good people. No, that is not what it means at all, as we cannot be like Jesus. We are to be those who have denied ourselves, taken up our cross, died to our old way of life, and did things and followed Him. So, it means,

“...Instead of trying so hard to be LIKE Jesus, can we all make it our goal to be WITH Jesus?”²

But how can I be with Jesus if I am not meant to be good? We need to deny ourselves and die to our selfish efforts for acceptance with God and realise that there is nothing that we can do to make ourselves acceptable. We need to be crucified. Did Jesus mean an actual physical crucifixion for

² “Stop Trying To Be Like Jesus?” <https://beautifullymessedup.com/stop-trying-to-be-like-jesus/> (29th March 2021).

each of us? Or else does He mean something else more symbolic? So, what does it mean that we as Christ-followers need to take up our cross? As Jesus said,

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow Me” (Matt 16:24 NASB).

We need to realise that this was not the first time Matthew recorded Jesus telling His followers to take up their cross and follow Him. For example,

“And they who do not take their cross and follow after Me is not worthy (i.e., *having weight*) of Me” (Matt 10:38 NASB).

Jesus said this in the context of placing Him above all others. His followers were to put themselves on the scales of life and relationships and not being lightweight. Instead, Christ-followers are meant to the weight of the new Kingdom life. So, thereby being worthy of Jesus. The only way that this could happen was through taking up their cross and dying to the old self-centred life.

So, practically how do we put this into practice daily? It is being intentional about changing our perspective as to our current reality. If we are not a Christ-follower, then the only way to become one by the way that Jesus had set. That is, by denying oneself, taking up our cross and dying to the self-centred, sinful life. However, if we are already a Christ-follower, we have already denied ourselves by taking up our cross and have already died.

However, it may seem that this is a perspective of an upside-down way of thinking for many. It may appear to be an upside-down to see things from this standpoint, but this is a more accurate view. In fact, it is the right way up. Remember that Jesus had come to refocus His own on the Kingdom of God way of seeing things. So, as Christ-followers, since we have already been crucified with Jesus, we need to put others first. We all need to be continually reminded that we are already dead and have a new life. It is not at all an upside-down way of seeing things but is the proper perspective.

Consequently, to consciously and intentionally understand that we have denied ourselves, taken up our cross and be following Him is a helpful way to remind ourselves that we have a new life. But what does it mean that we have died and are now new? Well, it is essential to remember that,

“Jesus didn’t come to make you better,” concluded Mr Preacher, “He came to make you NEW!”³

In his letter to the local church to the young Christ-followers in Galatia (modern Turkey), Paul had something to say about taking up our cross. He said that we have already died and are now new. He reminded them that he had already been crucified with Christ. That is,

“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal 2:20 NASB).

“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14 NASB).

Therefore, we need to be living our lives from this perspective and not the old way of thinking. By faith, we are to live a life that, in light of the truth that we now live in Christ and Christ in us. It is that we are now one. We have already died when Jesus was crucified and were raised to new life when He was raised. If that is not enough, Paul went on to remind his readers that the world had been crucified to him and us, and we to the world. We are in a different culture, one where there is a higher life here and now. It is not a future reality but a current one. It is the Kingdom of God culture

³ “Stop Trying To Be Like Jesus?” <https://beautifullymessedup.com/stop-trying-to-be-like-jesus/> (29th March 2021).

that we are a part of right now. It is the right-way-up way of seeing things in this toppy turvy world system.

So, following Jesus daily lives, we need to continuously remind ourselves that our old self-centred pride-filled life is dead. That we now are to be living from our new Kingdom of God-life. Paul said this to the Christ-followers in the local church in Philippi. That is,

⁵ “Have this attitude in (or among) yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (Lit asserted), ⁷ but emptied Himself (or laid aside His privileges), taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of people. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on (Lit. of) a cross” (Phil 2:5-8 NASB).

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. Why do you think the cross is so central to our life as Christ-followers?

Firstly, today, if you are not a Christ-follower, would you like to become one? Well, then you will need to deny yourself and take up your cross. To you, that means to recognise that your current way of living just won't cut it with God. It does not matter what you do; you cannot fix your life. Also, to admit that you have not done well to this point of time by yourself. You need to ask Jesus to take over your life. It will mean that your ideas of what life means will need to die. To ask Him to forgive you for the things you have done and said that, well, have been selfish, pride-filled and all about you. Consequently, your current life needs to die; it needs to be crucified. To do this, you need to put Jesus's will above your own. Then you will need to ask Him to give you a new start in life and do things His way. Then and only then can you receive the new life offered by Him.

If we are already a Christ-follower, we will need to realise that we have already denied ourselves and taken up our cross. That may mean that we consciously and intentionally put His will and others before ourselves and die to our self-centred choices and wants. Then choose to follow Him willingly and joyfully. It needs to be something that we decide to do as a constant reminder that we have died and have a new life. We have opportunities every day to sow the seed of the Kingdom of God. We are all seed carriers of this new life, not merely fruit producers. Remember that any fruit is simply a holder of the seed. So that when it falls from the plant, it has a ready-made composting system to feed the seed to reproduce after its sort. For example, an apple seed will produce an apple tree. We, as Christ-followers, are to plant seeds of the new life of the Kingdom of God life so that other Christ-followers will grow.

It is an opportunity this Easter to realign ourselves to our true focus. Namely, as Christ-followers, we have already died to our old self with its old ways of thinking and doing things. In considering this, we need to recognise that we already have a new life. Even if we sometimes default to our old dead ways of thinking and actions, we have been living it. So, practically as a reminder of this truth, we need to make choices to deny our old lives and remember that we have taken up our cross and been crucified with Jesus. As Christ-followers, we need to live from the attitude, which Christ Jesus had. In that, He emptied Himself, took the form of a love-servant, humbled and denied Himself. He also became obedient to the point of death, took up His cross and following the Father's will and died. (Phil 2:5-8).