

Why Must We Take Up a Cross?

Devotional #16, Mark 8:22 – 9:1

22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." 30 And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

- Mark 8:22 – 9:1, ESV

Jesus makes it very clear in Mark 8:33-38 that the way of following Him is the way of the cross. Now, today, we think of taking up our cross in metaphorical terms and it can seem very abstract and removed from the reality of our lives. But in Jesus' day, the cross was a very public, visible and well-known instrument of brutal execution. More importantly, in just a little while, Jesus Himself would take up a very real cross and die on it for His people. This was no clever metaphor for Him.

In response to Peter's clear confession, Jesus began clearly telling His disciples God's plan for their redemption through His death. Peter responded to this news by taking Jesus aside and trying to correct His thinking. But Jesus would have none of it. The only voice that would seek to offer Jesus a kingdom without a cross was the devil himself, so Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Today, some preachers and television charlatans preach a Gospel without suffering for the Christian. To these health-and-wealth prosperity preachers, we need to speak the words of Jesus, "Get behind us, Satan!" This slippery deception of false teachers is designed to keep the church from her real calling. We must take up our cross and follow Jesus.

But why?

We can deduce several reasons from this passage and from the rest of Scripture:

1. We must suffer because of sin, sin in our own hearts and lives and sin in the world. The sin in our hearts means that we must reject our selfish desires, including our desires for a comfortable and easy life. The sin in the world means that the world will always accuse and persecute at some level those who are seeking to honor God with their lives.

2. We suffer because we are followers of Jesus, and He suffered. Jesus suffered in obedience to His Heavenly Father. He entrusted Himself into the hands of God and was willing to do His will, whatever the cost. Likewise, if we follow Him, we will trust God no matter what, even when that trust costs us dearly in this world.

3. We suffer because doing so overcomes the devil's schemes. Submitting ourselves to God and resisting Satan's temptations to sin and complacency leads us to a place where we find freedom and peace.

Is it worth it? Of course, it is! Remember Jesus' words, "*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?*" If we understand the real value of the world, our souls and the kingdom of God, we can respond in only one way: We take up the cross and follow Jesus, no matter the cost!