

Take Up Your Cross (Mark 8:31-38)

- 1) Expect to suffer
- 2) Persevere to the end

If someone is trying to sell you something, they're going to tell you the good things. What do you hear on commercials or ads for new cars? *"Drive home in a nicer, newer car today! No credit, no problem! Trade in your clunker and leave with a car that will make you happy."* Dealerships do this on purpose because they want you to buy. It wouldn't make much sense if they listed the negatives instead of the positives. Imagine you were to hear something like this, *"Lock yourself in a monthly car payment for years to come! Make yourself worry when your new car is parked outside and the kids are playing next to it!"* Would you want to go to the dealership after hearing those negative reasons? Probably not. But whether or not you're going to buy a new car, you're going to have the positives and negatives. It's part of the whole package.

Calling yourself a Christian likewise has positives and negatives. The positives are far greater than any of the negatives because to be a Christian means you are forgiven and loved by God above. But there are some negatives that can make us wonder if our faith is really worth it all. It's those negatives we're going to talk about this morning as we look at the teaching called – the theology of the cross. Normally when we talk about a cross, we're referring to the cross on Golgotha where Jesus died to pay for our sins. But when we're talking about the theology of the cross, it refers to the sorrows and sufferings we endure for being a Christian. Jesus tells us what the theology of the cross in our verses from the Gospel of Mark chapter 8. He warns us to expect sufferings and gives us the reason why we persevere those them.

Listen to how Jesus explains to the disciples and crowds what it means to live as a Christian under the theology of the cross. **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."**ⁱ There are 3 things that Jesus spells out: 1) deny yourself, 2) take up your cross, and 3) follow Christ. To deny yourself means to say no to your sinful self and its evil desires. By nature we are all selfish and work to serve number 1. So to live for Christ means to deny our selfish attitude and conform it to God's will as the motivation of all we do.ⁱⁱ After we deny ourselves, we then take up our cross by being willing to suffer whatever comes our way. This could be dishonor from our peers, disgrace from our bosses, shame from our society, and could include dying as a martyr.ⁱⁱⁱ All these

things come together as we follow Christ with faith-filled hearts. You can't live as a Christian without denying yourself and taking up your cross. Satan and this sinful world will give you grief one way or another if you believe that Jesus is your Savior. Faith in Christ and the theology of the cross go hand-in-hand.^{iv}

Not many people like to think about that. People can think that Christians go through life happy go lucky without a care.^v It's true that Christians may not get as wound up by events in this world. There is another life to come after this one. But to say that Christians don't have real problems that leave scars on our hearts is to deny the theology of the cross.

Our Savior lived under the theology of the cross. Up until these verses, just about everyone figured that Jesus would continue to rise in popularity and become an earthly king of sorts. That's what the 1st century world thought the prophesied Christ was supposed to do.^{vi} But if we were going to have a Savior from our sins, Jesus could not become an earthly king. Instead **“the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”**^{vii} This was the first time Jesus told his disciples about the many sufferings he expected. He suffered the disappointment and shame of the people he grew up with in Nazareth when they wouldn't believe that he was the promised Messiah.^{viii} The Jewish ruling council would reject Jesus by publicly slandering him^{ix} and weaseling their way within the 12 disciples.^x Pontius Pilate resigned himself to injustice by ordering Jesus to die on the cross. Our Savior knew all these things would happen to him as he warned the disciples in our verses this morning from Mark chapter 8. He could have avoided them and lived the easy life. But Christ chose to die on that cross on Golgotha so that our sins could be paid for in full. So that he could be our Savior and only means of escape from this sin-filled world.

This pattern of sorrows and sufferings is what we are to expect if we confess Christ with our hearts and hands. Don't think that you'll be the exception and somehow slip under the radar of Satan and his temptations. Your sinful flesh will try to lead you astray and persuade you that being a Christian isn't worth the pain. Perhaps it's a wandering eye that desires others in ways between a husband and a wife. Satan will tell you that life would be a lot more fun if you indulged your sinful instincts. Maybe it'll be when the offering plate is passed around and you hold back what you were planning to give because you doubt if God will provide for your every need. Whether it's Sunday morning or not, Satan will tempt you to

look out for number 1 and satisfy your wants instead of thankfully supporting the gospel ministry. Maybe it'll be the loss of control as your body and mind fade away from age or disease. Satan will surely use this time of weakness to dredge up painful memories and ask you, *"How could God love you after all you did in your life? If this state of pain and confusion is how God treats you as his child, why hold on to him anymore? Let him go and enjoy what life you have left."*^{xi}

The theology of the cross is not easy. Christians will face additional hardships to take up their cross. But don't let the troubles of this world scare you away from joys of the world to come. For the sufferings that we endure, the crosses that we carry on our scarred backs, are proof that our sights are set on heaven. That we have in mind the things of God and not the things of men.^{xii} Jesus teaches the crowds that there is nothing in this world that's worth more than our souls.^{xiii} That's why Jesus had to come down from heaven and give his life on the cross for our forgiveness. Nothing else would satisfy God's righteous wrath for our sins.

The theology of the cross may be harsh now. But what comes at the end is worth all the sufferings. Jesus tells us what will happen on the Last Day to former Christians who gave up their faith because they weren't willing to endure the theology of the cross. **"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."**^{xiv} To be a Christian in this world means we expect to suffer at the hands of Satan and this sinful world. But a person is ashamed to be called God's child if because those sufferings are too much, they will miss out on the eternal joys of heaven. As they were ashamed to be Christ's, so Christ will be ashamed of them.

I know how hard it can be to keep your head held high under the theology of the cross. The student whose lessons teach ideas contrary to Scripture. The worker who can't express their faith for fear of ridicule. The spouse who fights that tireless battle about why they choose to spend precious time with God instead of their unbelieving partner. These crosses won't go away. But never be ashamed of your Savior and what he has done for you. He placed himself under God's law to keep it in our place. He willingly endured all kinds of sufferings. He gave his life on the cross to save sinners like you and me. He renews his forgiveness every time we come to him in repentance. Jesus never loses his patience with us. He guarantees that we will be with him in heaven when we pass away. And it is then when all those sufferings we earlier endured will be forgotten. For we will be with our God

and every other believer for the rest of time with joys that we can't begin to imagine.

Yes, the Christian life will bring sorrows and sufferings. We will not be the exception. But take up your cross and follow Christ. Deny your sinful nature and be willing to endure whatever comes your way because of your faith. Expect Satan to unleash every temptation upon you to shame you away from God. But take up your cross and look to Christ for strength. He too suffered as he made his way to the cross on Golgotha. He gave his life for our salvation. And he guarantees you what the world can't give. Peace with God. Forgiveness of all your sins. The joys of heaven waiting for you after you reach the finish line. Keep your eyes on the cross of Christ and take up your cross. Amen.

End Notes

ⁱ Mark 8:34b. All biblical quotations are from the 1984 edition of the NIV unless otherwise stated.

ⁱⁱ Harold Wicke, *The People's Bible: Mark* (Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI: 1988), 122.

ⁱⁱⁱ F. Wenzel, *The Wenzel Commentary: An Exegetical Study, Based on a Harmony of the Gospels* (Arrow Printing, Bemidji, MN: 1986), 369.

^{iv} Wenzel, 369.

^v For more information on this false concept, known as the theology of glory, read through Daniel Deutschlander's book *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours* chapter 4. It can be found in the library at Grace-Tucson.

^{vi} Wicke, 119.

^{vii} Mark 8:31.

^{viii} Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6a.

^{ix} All the different times they tried to trap Jesus with a difficult question or the lies they spread after the resurrection that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb.

^x They tempted Judas Iscariot and persuaded him to sin by betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10,11; Luke 22:3-6.

^{xi} Chapter 7 of Deutschlander's book *The Theology of the Cross* has much more information on these and other hardships that Christians go through during all the stages of life.

^{xii} Mark 8:33b.

^{xiii} Mark 8:36,37.

^{xiv} Mark 8:38.