

# Gospel and Carrying the Cross

## Outline

1. The Cross of Christ reveals the Heart of God
2. Take up your cross and follow Me
3. Simon of Cyrene
4. The Direction of our Journey in Life is first the Way Down to the Cross

### 1. The Cross of Christ reveals the Heart of God

Since the incarnation, and forever, Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, even in heaven (John 1:14, Phil 2:6-8, 1 Tim 2:5)

Jesus came to reveal the heart of the Father (John 1:18 *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*)

Jesus Christ reveals Himself as to His nature and purpose in suffering through the cross. Through the cross, Jesus, who came to reveal the Father, also reveals the true heart of God.

**God's Power:** God created the perfect world by His almighty power. But after the Fall of man — Satan, sin and death seem to have won. How and when was the power of Almighty God strong enough to defeat Satan, sin and death? It was on the cross — in weakness and suffering (the triumph is not complete yet, but it started when Jesus rose from the dead — defeating sin and death, and it will be finished at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming).

**God's Wisdom:** By His wisdom, God created a beautiful and orderly world (Prov 3:19). The variety of creation displays His great wisdom. But the Bible says God supremely manifests His wisdom on the cross (1 Cor 1:17-31).

### Christ Crucified Is God's Power and Wisdom

*1 Cor 1: 17-31 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.*

*<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, and God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

*<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so*

*that no one may boast before him.* <sup>30</sup> *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.* <sup>31</sup> *Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.*

What you see Jesus doing on the cross is:

- Loving the unlovely
- Dying for the unworthy

Then putting Himself where they should be, He died for them. He paid their penalty for sin and then rose again from the dead. Those who believe in Him are forgiven, made a new creation, and entered the kingdom of God. This is the gospel—the good news.

The world would say, that’s foolish. The world says, move the influential—people who can open doors for you and then help you to climb up. But Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” (Matt 5:3)

But no one in the world says to climb down and move with the unlovely and unworthy. That’s not the world’s way to be successful. But that’s what Jesus did. He modelled for us by washing His disciples’ feet and commanded us to follow — be servants.

## **2. Take up your cross and follow Me**

*Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

Jesus’ death on the cross is to pay for our sins and show how God deals with the people He loves. Many Christians want the first part of the gospel (pay for our sins) but not the second part (**carry our cross**). But the cross is the way how God blesses us.

Many Christians moan and grumble when bad things happen to them. They think, now that they accepted Jesus as their Saviour and said that God is their Father, how could bad things happen to them?

*Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.* (NKJV).

All things include evil/bad things. Horrible things happened to Jesus through no fault of His own. And through all things, God worked so powerfully in the suffering of Christ. So, when evil/bad things happen to us, and we struggle and suffer, consider God blesses us and makes us like Jesus.

## **3. Simon of Cyrene**

*Mark 15:21-22 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.* <sup>22</sup> *They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha.*

*Luke 23: 26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.*

**The facts:** Simon came from Cyrene, a city in North Africa (Libya) and was on his way “in” to Jerusalem from the country. He saw a procession of soldiers, a crowd, and a condemned criminal at the city gates. Mark says Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus. The *soldiers* seized and *forced* Simon to carry the cross *behind* Jesus.

**Most probably:** Simon was of Jewish descent or a Gentile God-fearer who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Being from Cyrene, he may not have known about Jesus, the Messiah.

Since Pilate and the Jewish leaders wanted to crucify Jesus, the soldiers did not want Him to die before reaching Calvary of extreme fatigue and weakness after flogging. So, the soldiers seized and forced a bystander, Simon, to carry the cross. For Simon, carrying the blood-stained cross of a criminal, which would defile him for the Passover, was unexpected and very unpleasant. Since he was behind Jesus, I wonder whether Simon moaned, grumbled, and even abused Jesus. I shudder to think how I would behave in Simon's place.

Simon carried the cross to the place of crucifixion (since Matt, Mark and Luke all say that Golgotha follows the verse about Simon carrying the cross). It defiled and messed him up for the Passover—now, no point going to the Temple. He would have stayed during the crucifixion, where he saw the sky become dark, the earthquake happens, and the centurion declared Jesus was indeed the Son of God. The Holy Spirit was moving in his life to becoming a Christian. Mark mentions that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. How would Mark know this except that the family became believers and later known to the Christian community? Carrying the cross and following Jesus was his blessing!

Simon went to a place he did not want to go (Golgotha) and did what he did not want to do — carry the cross of a criminal. But he did it anyway, which was a blessing for him and his family. Following Jesus often takes us to very unpleasant places and does unpleasant things in the service of the unlovely. But a blessing awaits us if we follow Jesus there.

The cross is not an irritation or trouble but an instrument of death. **To carry the cross means a man was on his way to death.** When Jesus says to deny myself and to take up my cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23), He means I am to follow Him into death to myself. He wasn't talking about being a martyr, although that might be the result sometimes. **He was talking about a continual denial of oneself on behalf of others, as seen in His example. To be a Christian, I must die before I die.** It means saying no to my old self as the natural motivation in my life and instead saying yes to the Lord Jesus as the new motivation. It means I must do the following:

- Stand for truth and witness of the gospel, even in the face of ridicule or loss.
- Walk the extra mile to serve others, even those who are unlovely and despised.
- Not push myself ahead of others to have first place.
- Be like Simon of Cyrene & carry my cross instead of moaning and grumbling.

#### **4. The Direction of our Journey in Life is first the Way Down to the Cross**

Paul wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. But he must first climb down to embrace the cross life (death to self), remain there, and then somehow get to climb up. The word "somehow" shows Paul was not presumptuous. It was not his effort to climb up, but he depended entirely on the resurrection power of Christ.

*Phil 3:10-11 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (NIV)*

*Phil 3:10-11 And I continually long to know the wonders of Jesus more fully and to experience the overflowing power of his resurrection working in me. I will be one with him in his sufferings and one with him in his death.<sup>11</sup> Only then will be able to experience complete oneness with him in his resurrection from the realm of death (The Passion Translation).*

*Phil 2:1-11<sup>1-4</sup> If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the*

*front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.*

*<sup>5-8</sup> Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.<sup>9-11</sup> Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father. (The Message Bible by Eugene Peterson)*

**Principle:** Remember that everyone gets stuck at some place in our journey to become like Jesus because we avoid the cross life, our minds are not renewed and our identity is more in our status than being a servant. Let us pray that God, in His mercy will send His Holy Spirit to convict us deeply and revive us by His word and grace so we get unstuck.