

SERMON: THE UGLY SIDE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 16:24

Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Introduction

Most things in life have at least two sides: a beautiful side and an ugly side - an easy side and a difficult side. That's the paradox of existence. Electric circuits have a positive charge and a negative charge. Every coin has two sides: heads and tails. Our market-driven economy stresses the positive without even mentioned the ugly side of things. Of course, we should accent and maximize the positive, but if we do not mention the negative aspects, disappointment and discouragement are sure to follow. It's a matter of balance. We see the athlete make a heroic game-winning play, but we did not see the years of training and disciplined practice. We eat delicious chicken wings and do not think about the slaughterhouses and the processing plants. Of course not, that would ruin our appetites. We just enjoy the scrumptious well-seasoned wings and then go on about our merry ways.

Granted: my use of the word, "ugly" may be considered hyperbolic, but that's how you emphatically make a point. Jesus used hyperbole many times. He told us to call no man father. That's just one example.

Now, let's look at the context of this sacred text. After Peter had made his profound declaration, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus thought it was time to make it unmistakably plain to them that He was to die on a cruel Roman cross. This was not what they wanted to hear. They could not accept a crucified Messiah. They wanted Jesus to use His miraculous power to expel the Romans and set us an earthly kingdom identical to David's kingdom. They wanted Jesus to lead a movement to make Israel great again.

For a Jew execution on a cross was the most repugnant, torturous, and shameful way to die. Just the thought of the cross was so horrible that if a Jew accidentally touched a cross, he or she was considered to be ceremonially unclean for fourteen days. The Jewish way of execution was stoning. Even in stoning there was mitigating mercy. A family member, usually a father or an uncle, was allowed to cast the first stone. The family member hoped to hit the criminal in the head and knock him or her unconscious and they would not feel the deadly impact of the other stones. (I know, this sounds very strange to us today.)

Jesus said bluntly, not only must I carry a cross, but you also must carry a cross. This is the only way you can really be one of my disciples. Without this commitment you are just giving me lip service. Let's walk through this verse and see some of the requirements for disciple. I admit, some are ugly with a capitol U.

Exposition

1. Renounce Your Allegiance To Yourself.

(True Success Comes From Self-Denial And Self-Discipline.)

2. Realize There Are Things Bigger Than Yourself.

(If It's Not Bigger Than You, It Will Fail When You Fail.)

(If It's Not Bigger Than You, It Will Die When You Die.)

3. Resolve To Sacrifice For The Good Of Others.

(Sometimes You Have To Help Yourself So That You Can Help Others.)

4. Remember A Cross Is A Burden You Voluntarily Choose.

(All Crosses Are Burdens, But Not All Burdens Are Crosses.)

(A Cross Is Innocent Suffering.)

(A Cross Is Difficult Service To Others.)

5. Renew Your Commitment Daily.

(It's A Marathon- Not A Sprint.)

Closing Thoughts

Because of the love that carried Christ to the cross, this symbol of shame has now been transformed in to a symbol of glory. The cross, which was a thing of cruelty, is now a symbol of mercy. Instead of being a symbol of fear, it is now a symbol of courage and inspiration. Yes, we have many crosses to bear, but only the cross of Calvary is the one that has saving power. Our crosses have serving power, but only the cross of Calvary has saving power. The blood that was shed on Calvary will never lose its power. Because the blood will never lose its power, one day we will lay down our crosses and pick up our crowns. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

End Notes.

1. The word “deny” in the Greek could be better translated as renounce or relinquish. When a new king or emperor came to power by military conquest, the citizens were required by threat of death to renounce allegiance to the old leader and swear allegiance to the new leader. Jesus is requiring followers to renounce allegiance to themselves and pledge allegiance to the work of His kingdom.
2. “Take up your cross” is in the aorist tense, which means a demand for immediate, decisive action. The tense for “Follow me,” is an action that starts immediately, but continues indefinitely into the future.
3. “Lay down our crosses and pick up our crowns,” is the paraphrasing of a song titled, *Pick Up A Crown*, by Maestro Heather Sorenson.

Related Scriptures

Matthew 10:38

Luke 9:23

Luke 14:27

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