

## When You Bear Your Cross, Christ Is Your King

Many Christians have a cross somewhere in their home - a religious plaque, perhaps, or maybe a painting. Some wear crosses around their neck or other jewellery. Others have a cross tattooed into their skin. I suppose these crosses mean different things to different people, but all crosses have one thing in common: they distil the essence of our faith. Whether an empty cross or a crucifix bearing the image of the crucified Redeemer, every cross captures the core of the Christian hope. Because Jesus Christ was crucified and has risen from the dead, there is forgiveness as well as the promise of resurrection into life everlasting for every believing sinner.

The cross is the sign of our salvation.

To preach Christ is always to preach His cross. As the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians, *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). The Christian gospel isn't sophisticated; no wonder highbrows so often scorn it. The cross is offensive. It grates on us that God would achieve His highest purpose through lowly degradation and in such disgusting squalor by using human flesh and bone; nails, spear, and wood; blood, sweat, and spit.

In the Gospel that Jesus proclaims, everything is turned inside out and upside down. In our world, winners take all. In His kingdom, the best take the lowest seat: *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 14:11). Likewise, whoever signs on with Jesus needs a radical attitude adjustment: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it”* (Mark 8:34-35).

Just what does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross? Some have turned their back on riches and fame and taken up serving the poor and destitute in Jesus' name. Others have given up promising careers in impressive fields and gone to seminary to learn to preach the gospel and pastor churches. Still others contend with physical disability or chronic illness every day of their lives. Some are mocked regularly and ridiculed as bigots or haters because they uphold biblical truth instead of cultural fads. Each of these instances fit into a larger pattern: the Christian life is upside down. It follows the pattern of Jesus' cross. As He won by losing, so we live by dying. In His cross and by His death He won life for us all. So upon His invitation we follow Jesus even though it may bring us suffering, misery, and loss.

For all, the cross is the sign of challenge.

In response to Jesus' call, people in every generation have confessed Him boldly in word and deed, no matter the consequences. Sometimes it leads to martyrdom. That price can be high. But to be a Christian witness doesn't always call for martyrdom. Neither do you need to be a pastor or missionary or social service worker to serve Jesus. Every Christian in his or her daily calling is challenged to put Jesus and His kingdom above every selfish motivation - to deny themselves, in other words - then follow Jesus where He takes them.

No matter your circumstances or daily occupations, Jesus is calling you to follow His lead - even if He takes you to places you would rather not go. Whether you're young or old, married or single, no matter your job or role in society - Jesus' invitation is challenging. “Deny yourself,” He says. “Take up your cross and follow Me.”

Jesus would be easier to follow if He would leave out that part about the cross. But that's the thing about Jesus: He's inseparable from His cross. Self-denial and hardship come together in His disciple-ship package. You can't sidestep the cross.

Frankly, Jesus wouldn't be much of a Saviour without His cross, would He? By His cross and in His death, He rescued us from sin, death, and hell. The cross was the price He paid to free us from that bondage. Because of our sins, we deserve nothing but God's judgment and condemnation, yet Jesus has cancelled out the judgment we deserved by His redeeming death. “This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). Likewise, He has trounced Satan and his demonic horde publicly with His cross. “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in the cross” (Colossians 2:15).

Since Christ Jesus laid down his life for us, forgiveness and a whole eternity of joy and bliss await every believing sinner in the resurrection. The cross isn't so bad if it's the cross of Jesus - for by His cross He has won our salvation.