

Sayings of Jesus 1 – Bearing our cross

Reading: Luke 14:27 “... *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*”¹

Introduction:

In this series of lessons we will be looking at various “sayings” of Jesus in order to determine what they mean for us as Christians in practical terms.

The context of the above reading is where Jesus told His audience about the cost of being His disciple.

- in verse **26**, He told them that He must have a higher priority in their lives than even those who are closest to them – their families.
- in verses **28-30**, He used the illustration of a person working out and considering the cost of a building project before starting the work, lest they get half way through the job and find that the cost is too high to complete.
- in verses **31-32**, He used the illustration of a king about to go to war, who considers whether he has the forces necessary for victory or not.

And so, in verse **26**, He uses the illustration of bearing a cross. In this lesson, we will look at what using the phrase “*bear his cross*” would have meant to His audience, the example of Jesus in bearing His cross, and what it means for us today as we strive to be His disciples.

LESSON

1) Crucifixion – executing people on a cross

a) The typical process

In order for us to understand what kind of impact Jesus’ statement (about “*bearing your cross*”) would have had on the Jews, I would first like us to look at what was involved in the crucifixion process.

Crucifixion was used as a means of execution by the Persians, Greeks and Phoenecians prior to Roman times. However, the Romans “perfected” it as a means of capital punishment. They reserved it for people such as slaves, robbers and assassins, and for rebellious people from the provinces. It was rarely used to execute Roman citizens².

Once the person was condemned to death, they were first scourged, *i.e.* flogged with a whip that had bits of bone and metal laced into the cord so that it tore away the flesh from the person’s back. This process was so cruel that it was referred to as the “intermediate” death – it was designed to almost kill the person without actually killing them.

The condemned person was then required to shoulder the cross-bar of the cross and carry it to the place of execution. Once on-site, he was then stripped of his clothes and either tied or nailed to the structure. Death was painfully slow, sometimes taking days. If the dying process needed to be speeded up, then usually the person’s legs were broken (as per **John 19:31-32**) so that the person could not support themselves by their legs.

¹ All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 1, A-C, page 1038

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According to Josephus, crucifixion was a common sight in Palestine³, and so the people to whom Jesus spoke in **Luke 14** would have well understood the literal meaning of “*bear your cross*”.

b) Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified in order to follow the Father’s Will

When Jesus made the statement about bearing your cross, He had not yet been crucified. But He knew it was coming (**Matthew 16:21**), and that He would feel all the pain and the shame that went with it. Throughout His trials and execution, He had to endure;

- lies being spoken about Him (**Matthew 26:60**).
- people taking His words out of context to misrepresent Him (**Matthew 26:61; John 2:19-21**).
- being accused of blasphemy when acknowledging that He was indeed the Son of God (**Matthew 26:63-65**).
- being spat upon, beaten, slapped, and mocked (**Matthew 26:67-68**).
- the chants of the crowd calling for Him to be crucified (**Luke 23:21**).
- being scourged with the whip (**Matthew 27:26**).
- standing before the whole garrison of the Praetorium while they taunted and ridiculed Him (**Matthew 27:27-31**).
- in His weakened state, carrying His cross part of the way to the site of execution (**Luke 23:26**).
- and finally, while hanging on the cross, He faced further ridicule as the religious leaders and the passers-by mocked Him (**Matthew 27:39-43**).

A key point to remember in all this is the fact that Jesus was no criminal. In fact, He was completely innocent and sinless (**Hebrews 4:15**). However, it was the Father’s will that Jesus become the sacrificial lamb for our sins so that we could have salvation (**Romans 5:6-10**). Therefore, Jesus obeyed the Father (**Luke 22:42; Philippians 2:8**), and lay down His life for us (**John 10:17-18**) so that we could be cleansed from all sin (**Colossians 1:21-22**).

2) Did Jesus mean that we too have to bear a literal cross?

a) He was talking about the sacrifices we make to follow Him

The context in which Jesus made the statement suggests that Jesus wasn’t necessarily talking about us taking up a literal cross. Yes, there were some members of the first century church who did indeed face death on a cross because of their faith⁴. But Jesus was primarily talking about the cost (or sacrifices) that we must be prepared to bear in order to be His disciple – the “*denying of self*” (**Mark 8:34**).

Regrettably, many people in this world face challenges and suffer hardship simply as a result of the physical circumstances in which they find themselves in this life. But this is not the cost that Jesus is talking about. He is talking about the cost that we bear in order to be, and as a result of being, His disciple, *i.e.* “... *for My name’s sake*...” (**Matthew 5:11; 10:39; 19:29; John 15:21; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 3:14-17; 4:14**).

³ Therefore, it is not unusual that two thieves were also crucified with Jesus.

⁴ The apostle Peter was executed on a cross – Ref: The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 4, M-P, page 739. Also **John 21:18-19; 2 Peter 1:14**.

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As we saw above, Jesus was obedient to the Father in all things (**John 8:29**), and the result of this obedience meant that He suffered and endured many things prior to His arrest and crucifixion. Some examples of these things can be seen during His ministry;

- some people were offended at His teaching and rejected Him (**Matthew 13:57**)
- others stopped following Him when they failed to understand what He was teaching (**John 6:66**)
- some wanted to stone Him, others wanted to throw Him off a cliff (**John 10:31; Luke 4:28-29**)
- the religious leaders were always trying to catch Him out with His words and deeds (**Luke 6:7; 11:53-54**)
- He was criticized for spending time with sinners (**Matthew 9:10-11; Luke 19:7**)
- some accused Him of doing the work of demons when He cast out evil spirits (**Mark 3:22**)
- there were even times when He couldn't even sit down and have a meal because the crowds wanted His attention (**Mark 3:20**)

But Jesus bore all these things, including the ultimate cost – death on the cross – because of what it would achieve. **Hebrews 12:2** tells us that;

“... for the joy set before Him (Jesus) endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In other words, these trials and tribulations weren't for nothing. Something of great value would be achieved as a result. That “joy” was the church, His bride (**Ephesians 5:25**), which had been planned before the world was even created (**Ephesians 1:4**). To be able to have a called out group of people (**1 Peter 2:9-10**), cleansed from all their sin, being a part of His body, doing His will on earth, and having an eternal inheritance in Heaven was worth all that He had to endure.

3) Application for us

So what does this mean for us? The text for this lesson indicates that in order to be His disciple, then it is going to cost us – there are sacrifices that we will have to be prepared to make in order to follow Him. Therefore, what type of things can we expect to have to endure in order to be faithful to Him?

We are fortunate enough to live in a free society. We do not have to endure “state sanctioned” persecution that Christians in some other countries have to endure. It is also most likely that we won't have our physical lives endangered because of our faith. But there can be many other things that happen on a daily basis that we need to bear. Depending on your individual circumstances, some of these can be;

- people may think that you are a “fundamentalist weirdo” for wanting to take the Bible literally and stick with just the Biblical teachings (**2 Timothy 1:13; 3:12**).
- some of your family or friends may want less to do with you because you don't think or act like them anymore – your value system is based on the principles taught in God's Word (**1 Peter 1:15-16**).

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- you may have a harsh boss at work, but the Lord wants you to work for him or her as if you are working for the Lord, so you do the best job you can under trying circumstances (**Colossians 3:22-23; 1 Peter 2:18-19**).
- you may not be as materially wealthy as you could be in business because you follow a high standard of ethics (**1 Timothy 6:9-10**).
- some of your time will be spent helping others instead of being used to do things that you want to do for yourself (**Philippians 2:3-4**).
- you may be falsely accused of causing dissention because you want to hold fast to the truth while others want to water it down (**2 Timothy 4:2-5**).
- you may experience heartache, frustration and discouragement as you exercise long-suffering with others while you wait for them to bear fruit of repentance (**1 Corinthians 13:4a**).
- you may have to accept being wronged by others, so as to keep peace and unity within the brethren (**1 Corinthians 6:1-7**).
- you may have to forgive someone over and over again – perhaps even “*seventy times seven*” (**Matthew 18:21-22**).
- there will be struggles within yourselves as you wrestle with temptation (**1 Corinthians 9:27**),

Enduring these things won't always be easy. There may well be times when you feel like giving up, wondering whether it is all worth it. But when we do endure these things for His sake, God considers that commendable (**1 Peter 2:19**); we are blessed (**James 1:12**). Consider the words of Jesus from **Matthew 5:11-12**;

“¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Jesus endured the pain of the cross because of the joy that was set before Him (**Hebrews 12:2**). We too have a joy set before us – an eternal home in Heaven with the Lord (**John 14:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**); a crown of righteousness (**2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 2:10b**).

Conclusion:

Following Jesus involves “*bearing our cross*”, because the ways of God are not the ways of the world (**Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 8:7-8**). Jesus also said that if we are not prepared to bear our cross, we cannot be His disciple (**Luke 14:27**).

But we are not alone as we wrestle with tribulations of this world. We have His promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**). We have brethren to help and encourage us (**1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24**). And we have the example of Jesus for inspiration (**Hebrews 12:3**).

“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”