

Follow the Way of the Cross

Two Paths: World or Cross

- Two ways to live life, two paths to follow, two ways to go: follow way of world/self (enjoy pleasures of world, live way you want, give into temptations, please self, not worry about God, not care how he wants you to live); or follow way of Christ (trust him as Savior, confess sins, admit guilt, see Jesus as only way, truth, life; live according to his will). Two paths to follow.
- I'm speaking to believers, so was Jesus last week in Gospel. Peter: "You are the Christ...", Messiah, destroy power of devil, free people to live with you in glorious kingdom of heaven!
- Disciples did not yet realize: way of Christ is way of cross. Following Christ does not mean everything easy, glorious; following Christ means bearing a cross. So if we as Christians come to fork in road and decide we'd rather follow Jesus than way of world that honors self, that means we'll face hardship, pain, cross. What it means to be follower of Jesus on road to heaven. So listen to Jesus today urge all of us to walk that path, and follow way of cross.



Jesus' Cross

- **Vs. 21.** Major turning point in Mt. Up until now: miracles, parables, and teachings. Now first time Jesus explicitly predicts death and res. Explains it, "**began to shew**" them. Probably missed res; got hung up on crucifixion and death, because not what they envisioned! **Vs. 22.** Took him aside: No! All-powerful; we've seen power. Can't let them kill you. That means defeat! 2 paths; I don't like path you're talking about – suffering, death; way of cross. "**Be it far from thee, Lord.**"
- Jesus' response: **vs. 23.** Satan! Never calls Pharisees, Satan. Harshes rebuke Jesus levies in NT! Why? Remember: 2 paths Jesus could have taken: way of world or way of cross; either savor things of God or of men. Peter was savoring things of men: in heart Peter wanted salvation without a cross. Wanted to see Savior glorified, but didn't want cross. Essentially told Jesus, your way (this suffering and death), that's not the right way! You need to follow my way; my way's better.
- We may never tell Jesus going to cross is not right way; we know Jesus saved us at cross. But pretty often we're guilty of telling Jesus: my way is better than your way. We come up with plans for way life should go; when it doesn't, we resent God for changing our plans, and act as if we're smarter than he is, as if he needs to follow our advice on how to run world and how to run our lives. That attitude raises self above God; what Peter did. Why Jesus, **vs. 23b.** Peter, you're getting in my way of following the way of cross, the only way that leads to salvation.
- Thankfully Jesus wasn't deterred. He knew there is no salvation without cross. He knew that in order to be Savior of world, he couldn't follow Peter's advice, take easy way out. Had to humbly submit to will of Father in heaven. God's will: Jesus suffer and die by the most humiliating form of execution Romans could think of. But by his cross, our sins were cancelled forever. And only after the cross came glorious res, victory over death and Satan that guarantees our res to eternal life in heaven. None of this would be reality had Jesus followed way of world, way that raises self above God. Only way for us to be saved was for Jesus to follow way of cross.

Our Cross

- Now, to all us who do believe in Jesus and follow him as Savior, Jesus says, follow me by following way of cross. We, fork in road; two paths: either follow way of world/self, make own decisions, follow own will, disregard God and focus on my wants, my desires, elevate myself. Or, if we want to follow Jesus as Christian, then we need to follow way of cross. Jesus did; now urges us to, as well.

- **Vs. 24.** Being a Christian involves suffering; following Christ means cross-bearing and self-denial. Inside each, sinful nature, says: want it my way, I'm number one, no God tells me what to do, my behavior is my business, live the way I want. Saw that in Peter: Jesus, do what I want. Sinful nature is really the self that Jesus wants us to deny. Since sinful self is so in love with world around us, denying self also means denying world, being willing to give up everything we have or want in this world, and considering God's will more important to me than my will; letting God be God, relegating myself to a position beneath him.
- That's denying self, and that's part of what it means to bear a cross. But crosses come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes cross is what we suffer specifically for being Christian. When Isis beheads Christians in Middle East for not converting to Islam, that's a heavy cross. And the self in us rises up and says, "God, why?! Not a good plan! Put an end to it!" Jesus: **vs. 24b-25.** Bitter pill, knowing that physical death may be the cross some have to bear. In America we don't face those crosses; may be ridiculed and mocked for faith. But fact is, over centuries, many Christians all over world, literally have faced death for their faith. That's a heavy cross.
- But there are other crosses we bear; in general sense, cross can be any kind of suffering Christian must endure in this life: sickness, sadness, pain, death, financial hardship, emotional stress – whatever God in his wisdom allows us to carry as we follow Jesus on way of the cross. Only a Christian who understands these words can bear life's crosses knowing by faith that God is in control and that even this cross is meant for my good because my loving God has decided to place it on my back. I don't know what crosses you are bearing right now – some of you I do. Everyone has crosses to bear, young or old, child or middle aged or senior. Some small, some very heavy. But no cross is too heavy with Jesus, who carried cross of our salvation, and who now calls on us and strengthens us to carry our cross.

Two Paths: Follow the Way of the Cross

- **Vs. 24.** There's this fork in road. When Jesus came to it, could have taken the easy way, followed way of world, like Peter wanted. But then he would be no Savior. Instead Jesus followed way of cross; submitted himself to God's will, did what God wanted without complaining, suffered and died on cross, then rose to eternal glory. God's plan for Jesus – way of cross. God's plan for us is way of cross, as well. At this fork in road we could take the easy way, live way world lives, give into desires of sinful nature, live for ourselves, ignoring God's will. But then we'd be no Christian. Instead we follow way of cross; submit to God's will, do what God wants us to do without complaining, endure the sufferings and pain God places into our lives without doubting him. We take up our cross, whatever, and follow Jesus. It's the harder path, but it's the path Jesus followed and the only path that leads to eternal life. So, follow way of cross and know that since Jesus has been down this path, he'll be with you every step of the way.

Matthew 16:21-26 (KJV)

²¹ From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²² Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. ²³ But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

²⁴ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶ For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?