

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

say about Jesus that makes all the difference between confessing Him and denying Him?

12. State the declarations in this section that emphasize Jesus' authority.

SERMON

ON SELF-DENIAL AND  
CROSS-BEARING:

"THE INFLUENCE OF THE CROSS IN THE  
LIFE OF THE BELIEVER"

TEXT: MT. 10:38

**Introduction:** The very word "cross" immediately evokes the image of the instrument of torture on which Jesus died. However in the NT at least one fourth of the references to the cross (6 in 27) do not refer to His cross at all, but rather to the cross of every believer. (Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27; Gal. 6:14) But how does the cross involve the life of every Christian? To answer this question, we need to see:

I. The MEANING of the Cross in the Life of the Believer.

A. This is not simply, or only, martyrdom, a literal death on the cross.

1. This is obvious from the fact that Jesus Himself at the moment He uttered this challenge apparently did not expect any disciple to comply literally with the command.

a. Therefore, the "cross" is figurative.

b. But, though figurative, this cannot mean it is somehow less real.

c. In fact, it is something so very real that our whole discipleship and consequent salvation depends upon it! (Lk. 14:27)

2. Nor can it mean merely martyrdom, because Jesus expected all true disciples to comply immediately as if it were a matter of life and death.

a. This is true, even though some disciples, who were acceptable to the Lord, never tasted martyrdom and

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yet they may be presumed to have borne their "cross" worthily.

- b. Some disciples who were standing there immediately present did not suffer martyrdom for several years and yet may be presumed to have begun bearing their cross shortly after the Lord said this, and for some time until their death.
  - c. If the *cross* must be taken literally or legalistically, what do we do with those poor souls who died by decapitation, by being boiled alive or burned at the stake? Though these did not die on the cross, should it be deduced from this that they did not somehow "bear their cross" worthily?
- B. Nor is bearing one's cross simply the sum total of the pains and difficulties that assault the disciple throughout life.
1. The Lord does not take notice of the size of the callouses on our hands. He looks rather at how we earned them.
  2. There are large numbers of people who suffer greatly without intending for one minute to bear any kind of cross: as far as they are concerned, their suffering has nothing to do with Jesus, since they have no connection with Him.
  3. So the cross is not simply the normal suffering in life.
- C. The true meaning of the cross is our imitation of, and identification with, Jesus, i.e. our assuming the same attitudes He manifested throughout His life.
1. The cross probably has the same meaning in the life of the disciple as it had for the life of his Master. (Mt. 10:24, 25; Heb. 13:24, 25)
  2. Jesus had already felt the effects of the cross for the entire 33 years that preceded that mortal crisis that took place on Golgotha. (Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
  3. All of the temptations Jesus faced and defeated are evidences of His conquest of His ego, the victory over His selfish passions.
  4. So the meaning of cross-bearing and the nature of self-denial is putting to death in our lives all that:
    - a. hinders fellowship with our God;
    - b. harms relations with our fellowman;
    - c. holds self apart for self alone.
- D. Having understood the meaning of the cross, we are driven to look into . . .

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### II. The NECESSITY of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

- A. In order to solve society's deepest problem, man's own beastly selfishness, the cross is necessary.
  1. Self-denial is absolutely essential to the well-being of society in all its relationships, since it is the key to the removal of selfishness, the root of all of society's problems.
  2. It is the voluntary placing ourselves at the service of others AS IF we were their inferiors, even though in many cases we are their superiors (and too often we think we are when we are not!). Examples: parent/child; student/professor; employer/employee; government/citizens; merchant/customer; elders/younger.
- B. To be able to fulfil the very spirit of Jesus' ideals, the cross is necessary.
  1. The faith Jesus taught requires not only a belief in His doctrine or an intellectual adherence to His ideals.
  2. Rather, He demands that conquest of the ego, that total defeat of self.
    - a. This is something much more difficult, much more profound than a superficial assent to a new creed, however well-stated, convenient but innocuous.
    - b. This is, rather, the willing execution of that rebel who would kick God off His throne, and seat himself in His place, ruling his own little universe.
    - c. This self-renunciation is more basic than that external conformity to a new, however superficial, set of ideals.
    - d. This is literally starting over, because Jesus wants to change the man from within by making him a new creature!
  3. Jesus knows how impossible it is to require that the old man, in his present condition, reach those ideals which are absolutely necessary and obligatory to please God, and live lives worthy of sons of God.
    - a. Law, any law, could require a certain external conformity to certain norms, but it could not touch the heart, could not require that a man think or feel rightly.
    - b. For this result, it is necessary to begin again by creating the new man from within.
    - c. The result? In this way alone can we reach the spirit, not only the form, of the ideals of Jesus.

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C. To be ABLE to put Jesus' ideals into practice, the cross is necessary:

1. So long as that rebel remains alive, so long will Jesus' ideals be impracticable, unreachable.
2. It is when man throws down his last line of defense that barricades him against his God, when he lays himself bare to the righteous sentence of death against him, without justifications or excuses, when he DIES, only then can that new man rise in him, created in the image of Jesus. Only then is he able to be the man that, in his dreams, he might have been.

D. The cross is necessary in order to be able to ENJOY Christianity:

1. The cross rudely puts an end to that desperate clinging to two worlds, trying to grasp the best of both, but fails to win either, since he who tries it is unable, because unwilling, to pay the price and accept the discipline required to gain them. Consequently, the man who tries it remains in the middle, half-way between both worlds, deluded, frustrated, unable to reach either. So he loses the best of both.
2. But the cross, having put to death, put to silence the selfish cries of the old mad fool, leaves the man with his heart whole, his mind sane, his life and desires united. With one heart, undivided by contradictory claims on his attention, the man can by the grace of God confidently reach for all the fullest joys to be had in Christ's service here on earth and all the best of heaven!

E. The cross is necessary in order to be able to hold out to the end.

1. The man who has already accepted his own death as
  - a. a past fact;
  - b. a victory for true justice;
  - c. a justified execution of a notorious criminal;
  - d. and a voluntary surrender of himself to God,cannot have much sympathy with those temptations that would turn him back into the wretch he used to be.
2. Such a man cannot count his earthly life as dear to him, whether his persecutors would make it miserable for him or his tormenters would take it from him.

F. This helps us to appreciate . . .

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### III. The REASONABLENESS of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

#### A. In relationship to God's character:

1. The death of the rebel is in perfect harmony with the solemn holiness of a just God whose righteousness has been offended.
2. He who has known something of the holiness of God could not seriously object to the capital punishment of anyone who would dare shake his puny, grimy fist at the Almighty.
3. Above all, His permission to cancel that old rebel in us and start all over is an act of pure grace and generous love!

#### B. In relation to our social relations with one another.

1. When selfishness is dead, where love is alive, we have nothing short of heaven on earth! (Ro. 13:8-10)
2. This freely chosen renunciation of our own selfish desires in favor of the needs of another, automatically brings about that gentle courtesy, that thoughtfulness, that helpfulness that smooths out all our associations with others. (Ro. 15:1-7)

#### C. In relation to our own final destiny:

1. The Lord is training us, disciplining us, for a position, an eternity of infinite value and dignity. (Heb. 12:1-11)
  - a. Every time, therefore, that we succeed in doing the unselfish deed, we create in this way our own character.
  - b. Every time we fall again into selfish ways of thinking or acting, the Lord can help us to rise again and try it once more.
2. Our character, acquired in this way, accompanies us in death and right on through the resurrection. Nothing is ever lost of this discipline of the cross.

CONCLUSION: Let us affirm with the Apostle Paul Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14.

## Section 23

# JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

## V. JESUS REWARDS THOSE WHO WELCOME HIS SERVANTS

TEXT: 10:40-42