

## Mark 8:27-38 – Love is Your Cross

It seems pretty arrogant for Peter to tell Jesus He was wrong. The Kingdom of God isn't going to come by betrayal, suffering, cross, and death. It might have been Peter attempting to protect Jesus but it was more than foolish. It was satanic and earned Peter a swift rebuke from Jesus. Could it be that there is the same bit of Satan in us that Jesus must also cast aside?

No, I don't mean we want to prevent Jesus from suffering and dying on our behalf. I am talking about the rest of what Jesus said. **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me ... and lose his life for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel ...”** We are not as concerned with what happens to Jesus as we are what happens to us. Jesus can go and do what He must but the way of the cross, suffering, self-denial, and service is not my plan.

**“If any would come after me, let him deny himself.”** These are the hard words of the Gospel. It is great to receive but it is not so great when receiving comes with consequences. Here Jesus calls us to self-denial – to deny that we are in charge of our lives, that we can handle everything that happens to us all by ourselves, that we are basically good and slip up only now and again. Self-denial does not begin with giving up little things we like, it means surrendering our independence because all it has earned us is death and despair.

The call of Christ is to surrender what matters to most of us – our very selves, our lives, and our happiness. You cannot have it all – not God and mammon, not your way and His way. Don't blame me; this is Jesus talking. You cannot love yourself and seek the things that appeal to your happiness and pleasure and be a follower of Christ. It's not Christ and what I want but Christ alone. So precious is the Gospel as a treasure that we give up every other treasure for it. Even our very selves.

You have no glory. Sin has stolen every glory you were created to enjoy and the devil has left you alone in your sin, alone in your guilt and shame, powerless to do what is good and right, and impotent before the enemy death. No, the only glory we can hope to have is the glory Jesus gives us, the glory He gave to us in our baptism, and the glory we grasped by faith.

**If any would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.** But what cross must we take up? Though we usually think of problems in life or problem people in our lives, these are not our crosses. No matter how hard your spouse is to live with or your job is to work or your finances to balance, these are not your crosses. The cross is not your choosing nor is it a consequence of living in a sinful and fallen world. The cross is the shape of Jesus' own cross lived out in the domain of your own daily life and work.

Love is your cross. Loving your spouse, children, neighbor, stranger, and even enemy as Christ loved you – even to death upon the cross. You do not manufacture this love but mirror or reflect it. What Christ has done for you in love, you do in love toward others.

What cross? Love. Love that sacrifices is the only real love there is. Marriages and families do not fail because people run out of passion for each other; we run out of passion all the time. They fail because we get to a point where we refuse to give up any more for that man or woman or parent or child. Love fails when we no longer pay the price of loving. Jesus loved us to death on a cross. Like that old Meatloaf song, “I will do anything for love but I won't do that.” When we can identify the “that” we will not do, love dies. Christ's love does not fail because it has no ending point. He loved us to the end; He loved us more than life itself.

Take up what cross? Love is not a temporary or even momentary choice. The love which we receive from Christ is that love that loves until all things are complete. Love that does not give up on Christ or reject God when things don't go as we desire. That is the cross we bear – we live by faith and not by sight, trusting in what we cannot see and may never see until Christ returns to finish it all. We don't get to prove faith; all we can do is trust it.

There is enough Satan in us to resist this kind of self-denial so that it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit we believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, only by the power of the Holy Spirit, that let go of what the world insists is important to hold on by faith to that which is eternally important.

The athlete will pay this cost of self-denial in order to obtain the glory of winning but not forever. Christ has paid this cost for you and for me. We love not for the reward but because He first loved us. His unrelenting love on the cross is our strength, our patience, our hope, our endurance, our comfort, our peace, and our satisfaction. This is the cross shaped life of faith into which we were baptized and in which, by the power of the Spirit, we walk every day, one day at a time, toward the heavenly goal.