

I. TAKING UP OUR CROSS

A. Perhaps the most difficult saying that Jesus gave was actually to a whole crowd of people in Luke 14. Jesus turned to a large group of people, which included His own disciples, and told them that He appreciated that they were following Him, but that discipleship was conditional. He told them that they must carry their own cross or they cannot keep following Him.

27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luk 14:27 NASB)

B. This was not the cliché term that it has become today to us. Right now, the actual plain meaning of this is so far removed from us it is more rhetorical than impactful. When the crowd heard this, they had very present images in their minds. Jesus was talking about something that they had either seen in action themselves, or that they had heard about in detail.

C. The cross was the way the Romans killed criminals, rebels, and revolutionaries. There had been other crucifixions in Jerusalem in their lifetime. The Romans had the custom of leaving the criminal's bodies on the cross after they had died as a reminder to the city of what awaited criminals.

D. To 'take up your cross' was Jesus referencing the sentence that He would receive of carrying the crossbeam (*roughly 75-125 lbs.*) of His cross to the place where they would actually be fixed to the cross and killed for everyone to see.

E. Some of you might remember the movie *The Green Mile*. It was a movie in the late '90s about death row. The hallway that led to the electrocution chair was lined with green linoleum. So, going to your execution was called 'walking the green mile'. In this context, ***Jesus would have said, anyone who does not walk the green mile cannot follow me anymore!***

F. Taking up your cross wasn't just a reference to crucifixion. He was talking about the trip up to the crucifixion. Carrying your cross was what you did as you were walking up to your death and humiliation¹. In other words, Jesus is saying, ***"You can't just follow me now to hear a good message and watch of few miracles. You have to follow me and imitate me when I'm carrying my crossbeam!"***

1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (1Pe 4:1 NASB)

II. COUNTING THE COST

A. Jesus explains His unusual demands with two parables. The first parable is about a man who wants to build a tower. Jesus says that if the man does not count everything it is going to cost him to build it, then he will get to the end and not be able to finish it.

28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' (Luk 14:28-30 NASB)

¹ The word 'excruciating' is derived from the pain that came from crucifixion. Lit. ex- 'out of' -cruciating 'crucifying'.

B. Jesus is explaining that though they may have been well meaning and wanted to follow Him for the rest of their lives, if they do not take the cross and suffering into the equation then **they will get to the end and turn from Him.** In other words, you won't follow Him when it counts in the end. We'll talk more about this in a minute.

C. He also said that those who decide to follow Him and disregard His promise that everyone will have tribulation in this age will be like a king getting ready to go into battle against another king. If he doesn't take all of the information into account, then the king will end up having to **make a peace treaty with his enemy** to keep from being totally destroyed.

³¹ "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. (Luk 14:31-32 NASB)

³³ ...In the world you will have tribulation... (Jhn 16:33 ESV)

D. Jesus is explaining that if we do not take up our cross and follow after Him in the way that He lived, that we will end up in compromise with our enemy. If the cross is not a part of our understanding of following Jesus, then we will only follow Him when we have **enough money**, when **everyone things well of us**, and **all of our plans are being accomplished.**

E. When things are not going the way that we want to, then we will compromise with the enemy, the Devil. **Did you know that the Satan has a doctrine?** Satan is the father of lies, but he doesn't just tell random lies every time that he influences humans. **He has consistent lies.**

F. They were following Him because they were excited about Him being the Messiah and what that meant for them. When He called them He invited them to follow Him, but this was the first time that He told them where the following was going to take them. **Suffering before glory!**

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mar 1:17 NASB)

G. The first time Jesus told His disciples that He was going to suffer on the cross, his disciples were not ready to count the cost. Several of them began to entertain compromise with the Devil. This was probably the first time Judas began to entertain the idea of betraying Jesus. Even one of His main guys compromised enough with Satan's voice that he rebuked Jesus. Jesus spoke to him very sternly.

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. ²² Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Mat 16:21-23 NASB)

H. Does Jesus' response seem harsh to you? Satan? Really? Was He exaggerating? Jesus was not exaggerating. Jesus had heard this voice before. Jesus knew it was Satan, because this was Satan's doctrine. **'You can have the glory of the resurrection without suffering.'**

I. This is what he offered to Jesus in the final temptation when Jesus was in the wilderness. He offered to Jesus what the Father wanted to give Him anyways, only without the suffering. All that he required was a compromise or 'peace treaty' and Jesus would have taken His role over the nations without suffering.

⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." (Mat 4:8-9 NASB)

J. We also must repent of listening to this doctrine. It infiltrated the Church in the West like a Trojan horse inside of other doctrines like the 'pre-tribulation rapture', which teaches that the Church will be taken off of the earth before we have to go through the Great Tribulation. This is not what the Bible teaches, but this doctrine and others like it have created an environment where the message of discipleship and the cross have become ***practically irrelevant***.

III. THE END OF THE AGE

A. As many of you know, we are about to enter² into the most perilous time in all of human history. There is going to be a time of unparalleled pressure upon the whole earth.

²¹ "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. ²² "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect (on the earth) those days will be cut short. (Mat 24:21-22 NASB)

B. During this time there will not just be an increase of natural disasters, but the persecution of the saints will be the most intense and sinister calculated attack in Church history.

⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (Mat 24:9 NASB)

⁷ It was also given to him (the Man of Lawlessness) to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. (Rev 13:7 NASB)

²⁵ 'He (the Man of Lawlessness) will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they (the saints) will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time³. ²⁶ 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.' (Dan 7:25-27 NASB)

² Whether it is 5 years or 30 years, the time is already close. This was not meant to be a predictor of amount of time before the start of the Great Tribulation or the Second Coming of Jesus.

³ Time, times, and half a time is a reference to 3^{1/2} years. 'time' means a period of time or a year, 'times' is two of these periods or two years, and half a time is half of one year.

C. The Lord is orchestrating all of this for several reasons, but they all share one purpose. The whole drama that unfolds at the end of the age is meant to glorify Jesus on the earth. Jesus is seen as beautiful **in the midst of tribulation, persecution, and trials** when there are normal humans who rejoice in Him rather than clinging to false hopes of comfort, popularity, recognition, and ease.

22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely... 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Acts 16:22-25

D. This time is going to be so intense that many people around the earth who are presently following Jesus, will fall away and abandon the faith. This will happen for a variety of reasons, but clearly the pressure of those days will add a significant amount of weight to these choices.

9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. (Mat 24:9-10 NASB)

2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord (2nd coming) has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2Th 2:2-3 NASB)

E. The Lord knows that in that final generation there is coming the final test of the hearts of men. **The outcome will be eternal.** Right now we are experiencing the day of patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and tolerance. We cannot afford to interpret His stance right now as a wink at sin and compromise. There is coming a day when a choice to compromise will be final and eternal. You will not take the mark of allegiance to the antichrist and his kingdom and then change your mind later at a more convenient time.

9 Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (Rev 14:9-11 NASB)

IV. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PANGS

A. In light of this day that is coming there is coming a time, which is the most kind, tenderhearted, and merciful thing that God has done since the cross. It is called in Matthew 24 the **beginning of birth pangs**. This time will be an increased time of persecution, deception, wars, and natural disasters.

5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Mat 24:5-8 NASB)

B.The effect of the beginning of **birth pangs on the earth will be very similar to the initial contractions when a woman is in labor**. First, the mindset of the woman feeling them completely changes. It doesn't matter what had her attention before the birth pangs start, they now have all of her attention.

C.Instinctively, every woman knows two things that demand she completely focus on what is happening. First, she knows that **they are progressive in nature**. She will know that she must focus so that she can emotionally walk through the more challenging stages. **No experienced mother feels the initial contractions of labor and concludes, "eh, that wasn't so bad"**.

D.Next, she knows that **once true labor has started, it will not stop**. Not only are the pangs progressive, but once they start on planet earth there will be no more hope of going back to our pursuit of the American dream. This will be such a blessing! Although some will seek compromise to maintain life as usual, those who persevere until the end will walk in sobriety, knowing that we must prepare for the next things that are coming.

E.From the birth pangs all the way through the Great Tribulation the Lord is going to use all of these things to make the Bride ready for her wedding day. She must be prepared to walk faithfully through the perils of that day and to stand spotless before the Bridegroom. **The Church will be delivered of the love of money and purged from impurities completely before the day of the Lord.**

⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (Rev 19:7 NASB)

³³ "Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days. ... ³⁵

"Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time. (Dan 11:33, 35 NASB)

F.As Hitler rose to power in Germany, some calculate that up to 90% fell into apostasy. The reason, while history books may elaborate more on the details, was fairly simple. Hitler could offer them what they truly wanted. The promise of financial assistance, peace, and safety was enough to lure them into aligning with demonic doctrines and allegiance to state above allegiance to Jesus.

G.The Church at the end of the age must be purged from the love of money, and the lust for ease and comfort. We must learn from examples like Germany, and realize that we are prone to the same temptations that ultimately lead to looking the other way while millions of innocent were murdered.