



AND he said to them all, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* ²⁴ *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.* ²⁵ *For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?* ²⁶ *For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.* (Luke 9:23-26)

The quote from our Lord above was uttered just before He took Peter, James and John up the Mount of Transfiguration. The Transfiguration itself should bear comfort to us, as it did to our Lord, to know that there is a glorious victory just beyond the curtain of the physical death of the cross.

The mention of the cross has an unsettling effect on many Christians whose faith is more of the worldly variety; but those whose faith reaches from here to eternity take great courage at its mention and image. There can be no crown unless preceded by the cross.

What did our Lord mean by commanding that we *take up his* (our) *cross daily and follow me*? Do you believe that Christ faced the cross only when dark Calvary rose up on the Via Dolorosa? It followed Him always, in fact, the shadow of the wooden cross fell across the wooden manger which embraced our Lord at birth. To mortal man, that cross represented the Dead End; but to Christ, and His followers, it symbolizes only the beginning of a glorious union in Heaven with the Triune God and all our loved ones who precede us there. So *taking up our cross daily* means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus wherever they lead both BEFORE Calvary, and AFTER.

Paul well understood this when he wrote, ³⁰ *And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?* ³¹ *I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I DIE DAILY.* (1 Cor 15:30-31) The great Christian commentator, Matthew Henry explains it best:

All that are by faith united to Christ, are by his resurrection assured of their own. As through the sin of the first Adam, all men became mortal, because all had from him the same sinful nature, so, through the resurrection of Christ, shall all who are made to partake of the Spirit, and the spiritual nature, revive, and live for ever. There will be an order in the resurrection. Christ

himself has been the first-fruits; at his coming, his redeemed people will be raised before others; at the last the wicked will rise also. Then will be the end of this present state of things. Would we triumph in that solemn and important season, we must now submit to his rule, accept his salvation, and live to his glory. Then shall we rejoice in the completion of his undertaking, that God may receive the whole glory of our salvation, that we may forever serve him, and enjoy his favour. What shall those do, who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Perhaps baptism is used here in a figure, for afflictions, sufferings, and martyrdom, as Matthew 20:22-23. What is, or will become of those who have suffered many and great injuries, and have even lost their lives, for this doctrine of the resurrection, if the dead rise not at all? Whatever the meaning may be, doubtless the apostle's argument was understood by the Corinthians. And it is as plain to us that Christianity would be a foolish profession, if it proposed advantage to themselves by their faithfulness to God; and to have our fruit to holiness, that our end may be everlasting life. But we must not live like beasts, as we do not die like them. It must be ignorance of God that leads any to disbelieve the resurrection and future life. Those who own a God and a providence, and observe how unequal things are in the present life, how frequently the best men fare worst, cannot doubt as to an after-state, where everything will be set to rights. Let us not be joined with ungodly men; but warn all around us, especially children and young persons, to shun them as a pestilence. Let us awake to righteousness, and not sin.

Matthew Henry Concise

It seems joyful to follow Christ in many trails that he travelled. Most of us would have reveled at the Marriage Supper at which our Lord performed His first Miracle. We would envy those who stood without the tomb of Lazarus to behold the emerging of that friend of Jesus from the stone tomb at the Lord's command. We would have taken special pleasure in seeing the young daughter of Jairus open her beloved and precious eyes at our Lord's words, *Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.* (Mark 5:41)

There were many happy moments on the trail that our Lord walked on this earth but, remember, across every trail fell that shadow of the coming cross.

There were less joyful moments, too, such as our Lord's confrontation with the great ministers of that day – the Scribes, Pharisees, and priests. These were constantly dogging after the Lord to try to trip Him up in His words and deeds of mercy. But they always failed dismally in that effort, and their crude efforts always back-fired in their own faces.

Our Lord was not politically correct and spared no mercy for those who held themselves up as spiritual lords over the people. In fact, our Lord called them a *generation of vipers* and *children of their father the devil*. Likewise, we should not hesitate to label a sin for what it is. When we do so, we are not judging, but God's Word does judge sin for what it is. If I say a practicing homosexual is an abominable sinner, it is not my judgment I pronounce, but the judgment of God's Word.

In living out our Christian lives and testimony, we will confront the world's false professors, ministers, and reprobate rejecters of His Word, and the only Begotten Son. They will likewise reject us and try to exile us from all public discussion. If we respond in kind, we may be guilty of their own sins. Remember: the wicked can lie, steal and cheat based on their own values; but the Christian is held to a higher standard. We cannot lie or deceive to achieve our purpose. It is for this reason that it seems that the wicked always have an advantage over the righteous. But fear not, we have read the end of the Book and we know the plight that awaits the wicked.

We take up our cross daily when we suffer rejection by friends and associates because of our lively faith. When we are confronted by liars and deceivers we would sometimes like to lie a bit ourselves for advantage. But we do not – we CANNOT! So we suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune sponsored by worldly sinners.

There are times when our stomachs are full and our robes warm that we see a poor, dejected orphan child, or beggar, on the street. It matters not what mistaken decisions may have led to the beggar being there, but there he is – and it falls our part to make his stomach as full as our own, and his body covered with warm attire. The child needs to be taken into the arms of a surrogate mother or father to tend their physical needs and to warm their terribly wounded little hearts. Even a stray dog or cat, as well, has feelings of pain and hunger which should be addressed by God’s people who are to have the dominion of care over the beasts of the field as well as widows, orphans, the naked, and the outcast. Doing these things appear to be dying to the world, but to the devout Christian, it is depositing future treasures in the sure Bank of our Father in Heaven.

Taking up our cross daily does not mean that we are always facing sorrows and deprivations. We reap such a wonderful reward in our souls (and in Heaven) by giving out of our need to the poor and needy. If we can provide healing to a child or person along our way, we must take time to do so.

But dying daily can also mean great sorrow in being rejected, not only by friends, but even family members. They will perceive the sincere believer to be very peculiar – a term which means ‘deranged’ in modern parlance, but blessed and accepted in the vocabulary of Paradise to which we are bound. Sometimes, taking up our cross means suffering beheadings as many Christians have courageously done at the hands of an evil and fanatic Islamic uprising in the Middle East and North Africa.

But taking up our cross means also to share in its victory purchased by the very blood of our beloved Savior and Redeemer. We follow to Galilee. We follow to the banqueting house. We follow to the Mount of Transfiguration. We follow on the waters of Jordan and Galilee. We follow to the Temple where the tables of commerce are turned in the House of Prayer. We follow to Bethany and, finally, to Jerusalem. We follow to the judgment hall of the High Priest, and to Pilate’s seat of judgment. We follow, bearing our crosses to Calvary where we may suffer the same cruelty as our Lord. But, we also lay down our cross at Calvary just as did our Lord. Our following is not over. We follow Him to a borrowed tomb. We follow Him in that restful sleep of death. And we follow Him in His resurrection as He emerges from that sealed tomb in the Garden.

We shall also follow Him up into the heavens and be received by that Cloud of Glory which received our Lord. That is the journey of the faithful Christian.

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:7-11)