**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Take Up Your Cross And Follow Him**

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”* On a previous program we noted that one of the requirements, if we are to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, is we must deny self. We talked about what it means to “deny self.” But Jesus also says in this passage that in addition to denying self, if one desires to come after Him, he must take up his cross daily and follow Him. What does Jesus mean when He says, “take up his cross daily”? This is what we want to talk about on our program today, and we are glad you are with us.

The cross was a form of execution for criminals. The Romans had developed crucifixion into a cruel tortuous slow death intent on inflicting the most pain and suffering. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus is saying that those who desire to come after Him must take up their cross and follow Him. There will be times in following Jesus one must undergo pain and suffering. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* To do the right thing is not always easy. It requires hardships and trials. Jesus doesn’t leave us guessing about what is involved in being His disciple. He comes out and tells us plainly that if we are to follow Him we must deny self and take up our cross.

First of all I want to make the point that denying self, taking up our cross and following Jesus is not just a matter of acting on impulse, but it is doing the right thing even when we know the hardships and difficulties that are ahead. Let me illustrate. There was a brother in the church in Birmingham, Alabama, who was out one day and saw an automobile accident. One of the cars burst into flames. This brother jumped out of his car, ran to the burning car and pulled the door open, somehow got the seatbelt loose and pulled the woman to safety and saved her life. Now, I don’t want to take away from what this brother did. It indeed was a remarkable act of courage. But he acted simply on the spur of the moment. Almost with no thought he went over and did what he needed to do to save this woman. But suppose that morning the brother somehow knew that later that day as he was out driving he would see an automobile accident, one of the cars would burst into flames, and if he attempted to save the woman in the car that car may explode and he could possibly be killed. What would he do knowing that he was going to face that challenge that day? If he still went out that day knowing what was going to happen, that would even be more courageous. You see, taking up our cross and following Jesus in not just a matter of acting on impulse, but it is doing the right thing even when we know the hardships and difficulties that are ahead.

Jesus is a good example of this. Prior to Jesus going to Jerusalem (where He would suffer and be crucified), He knew what was awaiting Him there. Matthew 17:22-23 says, *“Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them,*[that is to His disciples] *‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful.”* Also Matthew 20:17-19, *“17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.’”* Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him when He went to Jerusalem: 1) He would be betrayed. 2) The Jews would condemn Him to death. 3) He would be mocked and scourged. 3) He would be crucified. 4) He would rise again the third day. A coward would have come up with a thousand reasons why he shouldn’t go to Jerusalem. But Jesus was no coward.

Why did Jesus do this? Why did He go to Jerusalem, knowing He was going to be crucified there? For one reason it was because it was the Father’s will and He was determined to do the Father’s will. Jesus said in John 5:30, *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”* Remember, the night before He was crucified He prayed to the Father, *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”* (Matt. 26:39)

But another reason Jesus went to Jerusalem, knowing He was going to be crucified was because He loved man. The only way sinful man could be forgiven of his sins and go to heaven is for Jesus to die on the cross, and He knew that. Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, *“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* Jesus was willing to go to the cross because of His great love for us.

His love is seen in His selflessness while on the cross. He prayed for those who were crucifying Him. He said, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”* (Luke 23:34). To the thief on the cross who repented, Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23:43) To His mother He said, *“Woman, behold your son!”* and to John He said, *“Behold your mother!”* And the text says, *“And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.”* (John 19:26-27). All the way through His suffering Jesus thought of others. He was selfless.

Why did He go to Jerusalem when He knew what was awaiting Him there? He loved His Father with all His heart, soul, mind and strength, and He loved His neighbor as Himself.

And Jesus says to us, “If you will come after Me you must take up your cross, and follow Me.” But does not this imply that if we are to take our cross and follow Him, we do not just act on impulse, but we act even when we know the dire circumstances that await us, and we act, knowing the hardships ahead because of our love for God and our love for our fellowman.

Another good example doing what is right even when we know the hardships and difficulties that are ahead is the apostle Paul. Paul says in Romans 15:25-26, *“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”* Notice, Paul was going to Jerusalem. Why was he going there? It says, “to minister to the saints.” He was going to take the contribution from the Gentile churches for the needy Jewish saints in Jerusalem. But Paul knew that dangers awaited him in Jerusalem. Look with me in Acts chapter 20. Paul is on his third preaching journey on his way to Jerusalem. He comes to Miletus and speaks to the elders of the church in Ephesus. He says to them, *“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”* (vs. 22-23) Notice, Paul knew that persecution awaited him in Jerusalem, but he is going anyway. Later in Caesarea the prophet Agabus took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, *“So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver* *him into the hands of the Gentiles.”* (Acts 21:11) The brethren pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Some of us might try to find all the reasons we could to justify doing what the brethren wanted. But not Paul. Paul said to them in verse 13, *“What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Paul is doing the very thing Jesus told Him to do. He is taking up his cross and following Jesus.

Why was Paul so determined to go, knowing there were persecutions ahead? It was because of his love for Jesus and his love for his fellowman. We just read in Acts 21:13 where Paul said, *“...For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* He said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, *“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that* *I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord* *Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”* (Acts 20:24)

It was because of his love for his fellow man. As we read earlier, Paul was going to Jerusalem also to minister to the saints, to minister to their needs. (Rom. 15:25-26)

Are we getting some idea here of what it takes to take up our cross and follow Jesus? It is to go and do what is right even when we know the suffering that awaits us when we do it.

Let us make some applications before we close. A preacher sometimes must preach the truth from the pulpit even though he knows the elders will not be pleased and dire consequences await him. I know of a preacher who was preaching in one of the northwestern states and there were those in the church there who held to an unscriptural belief concerning divorce and remarriage. The preacher was told that if he preached what he believed (which was the truth) then he would no longer be allowed to preach there again. He preached the truth and had to move. It is as though Jesus is there saying to him, “Here is your cross. Take it up and follow Me.”

Sometimes we have the responsibility to reprove those who are in sin. Paul said to Titus in Titus 3:10 *“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,”* If a man is divisive, and you are the person who must go and admonish him, what do you think will be his reaction? One of the hardest things we do as Christians is to go to someone who has fallen into sin, or to someone who is divisive, and he is not one who has shown any evidence of wanting to repent. The Lord is saying, “Here’s your cross. Take it up and follow Me.”

A Christian may have to confront his boss because he is not willing to be a part of some dishonest endeavor that is being planned in the business, knowing that there is a good possibility that he will lose his job and he will be without income for him and his family. It is as though Jesus is standing there saying, “Here’s your cross. Take it up and follow Me.”

Here is a young sister who comes to realize what the Bible teaches concerning modest clothing and she refuses to wear immodest clothing, knowing that she will be made fun of by her peers at school. The Lord is saying to her, “Here’s your cross. Take it up and follow Me.”

How many other examples could we list?

And why do we do these things and face the hardships that come? It is because we love God and we love our fellowman.

We will never learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ until we take up our cross and follow Him, meaning we are willing to do what is right while at the same time knowing that hardships lie ahead. If doing what is right is always easy, then why does Jesus talk about taking up a cross? The cross was not easy. A cross is never easy. It takes courage. It takes conviction, a conviction you would die for. Jesus said, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*

Our time is gone for today.

But before we close we want to invite you to check out our website. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of Bible topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com, that’s sjchurchofchrist.com.