

“Deny Yourself, Take Up Your Cross, and Follow Me”

Who do people say Jesus is? He was a good man. A rabbi. A holy man. A religious leader. A prophet. Jesus was the reincarnation of John the Baptist or Elijah or some other prophet. Some religions teach that Jesus is the Michael angel. Some teach that Jesus is only God. Others teach that Jesus is only a man. And still others say that Jesus was a crazy man.

What did Peter say who Jesus is? The Christ, the Son of the living God.”

It was Martha, in **John 11:27**, who said, **“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”**

But who does Jesus say He is? The Gospel of John is known as the Great “I AM” of who Jesus is. For we read from several verses of what Jesus said about Himself and who He is.

Jn 8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Jn. 8:58 “I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!”

Jn. 10:7, 9 “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep...whoever enters through me will be saved.”

Jn. 11:25-26 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Jn 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

There are at least two more “I AM” statements that Jesus made in the gospel of John.

Jn 6:51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Jn 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

From these two verses, we learn that Jesus came as the suffering Messiah, the suffering Christ, who gave His life, who died for the sins of the world.

However, as you heard earlier in our Gospel reading from today, Peter did not want to hear that about Jesus. Peter pulled Jesus aside and started to rebuke Him, but then Jesus had an interesting come back. For He told Peter, **Mk. 8:33** **“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”**

What did Jesus mean by that? The Apostle Paul defines it in this way from **Rom. 8:6-7a** **The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God.**

We are a lot like Peter. We allow our sinful mind to be worldly and hostile toward God. We don't like God's plan and purpose for us. We want our road in life to be smooth, easy, with as few hassles as possible. We want to live our lives based on our own desires and feelings.

It's like when some people say, “Oh, yeah. I believe Jesus suffered, He died and rose for me, but I don't want Jesus to be my LORD. For Jesus to be my LORD – that is too heavy of a commitment. What counts is what I can get right now. I have things to do and things to take care of. What is important to me is ME, MYSELF, AND I.” Our way of life is to think of ourselves and our own happiness – which is selfish and self-centered.

Yet, Jesus said, **“Deny yourself.”** [Mk. 8:34] We tend to lead our lives of self-satisfaction. We want to control our own life's destiny. However, Jesus is teaching you and me that by denying yourself — is to know that there is more to life than things, possessions, and the like. To deny oneself is to stop worrying or being anxious about things. When you worry, you are focusing on yourself. But when we focus on Christ, we are centered in God's will and purpose in our lives. When you deny yourself, you are looking up to God for guidance, even if that guidance goes contrary to our own thoughts. For God said, in **Is. 55:8** **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.”**

To deny yourself is to humble yourself, to step aside and let Jesus do His thing in your life. Then you can say with John the Baptist in **Jn. 3:30** **He must become greater; I must become less.**

To deny yourself is to love Jesus Christ above other people. For we read from **Mt 10:37-38** **“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”**

To deny yourself is to take the focus off of yourself and love other people and build them up. For the Apostle Paul tells us in **Rom. 15:2-3 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”**

By the denial of self, Jesus means that you are to cease to make yourself the object of one's life and actions. Rather, He is to be the center of life.

The reality is this. When people spend all their energy on pleasures, possessions, positions or power, they will find in the end — these are all temporary, and come to nothing.

So, the question is this: Are you seeking God or seeking things? By seeking Jesus Christ, and denying yourself, you will know what it means to live abundantly according to His will and purpose. The next thing Jesus said, in our Gospel lesson, **“Take up your cross.” [Mk. 8:34]**

Take up your cross – Our way is to avoid the difficult and the burdensome. Jesus knows that taking up our cross in life is NOT so smooth and easy. It often involves a lot of work. At times, we will face persecution and suffering. Yet, Jesus is teaching us to see our crosses of trials and tribulations as opportunities and growth. As you heard earlier, in **Rom. 5:3-5**, the Apostle reminds us that **we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

Taking up our cross helps us to rely on God and how He works during those difficult times in our lives. God's gracious promise lightens the cross. The Apostle Paul tells us in **Rom. 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.**

Cross bearing is not just a once in awhile type of thing. Cross bearing is a daily task. Listen to what Jesus said in **Lk. 9:23 “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**

Taking up your cross is confessing Christ Jesus. Taking up your cross is acknowledging Jesus and identify yourselves with Him. To take up your cross daily is to live each day for Christ. To take up your cross is trusting that Jesus is the Christ. It is acknowledging and holding on to Him as your Redeemer, Savior,

and LORD.

If Jesus is your LORD, that means you pick up YOUR cross. If you try to take up someone else's cross, you are saying to them, "You need me. I can fix you. I can change you." You are not helping the other person at all. You are enabling them to suffering longer. You cannot fix or change the other person. That is God's job. The truth is — there is only one Christ, Savior and Lord, and you and I are not Him.

Deny himself and take up his cross, then Jesus said, "**FOLLOW ME.**"[Mk. 8:34] The problem is — we think our way is better. But by going our own we, we are saying we don't trust God. When it comes to every day life, we are to follow Christ. When it comes to eternal life, we are to follow Jesus Christ. For He said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life**" (Jn. 14:6). Salvation is through Christ alone. His way of life and to eternal life will enable us to believe and live through the working of the Holy Spirit.

How quickly does the Holy Spirit act? At once. Listen to what Jesus said in **Mt. 4:19-20** "**Come, follow me,**" Jesus said, "**and I will make you fishers of men.**" **At once they left their nets and followed him.** To follow Jesus is what it means to be His disciple. The commitment to follow Jesus is immediate, and to go and tell others who Jesus is.

What happens when you follow Jesus? **John 10:27-38** **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

Who should we be telling others who Jesus is? He is the Christ. For the Apostle Paul tells us in Rom. 5:8-11 **We have now been justified by his blood...we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...saved through his life...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS THAT PEOPLE OUT THERE NEED TO HERE FROM YOU!