

The Way of the Cross, Part 4

Many times my father has heard me say, “You know, I can nail in my feet and one of my hands, but that other hand – I just can’t seem to get it nailed onto the cross!” We are utterly unable to complete the task of our own crucifixion. Even Jesus needed someone else to nail Him to His cross. Fortunately God has a way for us as well. Like Jesus, we require the help of those around us to accomplish this dying to self in our lives. God has specifically designed both relationships and circumstances in your life and mine that will bring about our death to ourselves. The only question that remains is whether or not we will submit to God’s design.

Philippians 2:5 “**Have this attitude in yourselves** which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

What does a life of carrying the cross look like? To find that out we have to look at the life of Jesus Christ as He walked upon the earth in human form. Primarily Jesus lived a life of redemption. Jesus absorbed sin in every situation He found Himself in –healing the sick (facing head-on corrupted creation), raising the dead (overcoming death, the ultimate consequence of sin), preaching the good news to those who were lost (rescuing those taken over by sinful lives), and finally becoming sin for us on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21) – Jesus was constantly living out the call of His Father to have no regard for His own interests, but to focus His energy, His love, and His power on those around Him.

The ultimate picture of absorbing sin and redeeming mankind is found in one of Jesus’ last prayers uttered before He died, “*Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.*” What does a life of carrying the cross look like? It reflects a willingness to absorb the sin around you, a determination to recognize and act upon the knowledge that the sins committed by you and against you can – no, **must** – be taken to the cross and hung there – redeemed by the only One capable of redeeming them. Jesus showed us that the way of the cross is the way of forgiveness.

Luke 23:35 tells us that “*even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.’*” Most of us spend our lives trying to save ourselves. We are concerned about maintaining *our* rights, *our* feelings, *our* reputations, and *our* comfort. We find ourselves trying to look good to others while at the same time trying to get them to pay us back for the hurts they have caused us. But the cross calls us to something different, something higher, something apart from ourselves. “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*” We should be asking ourselves on a moment-by-moment basis, “What was my motive for this thought or action? Was it an attempt to save myself?”

I once heard sin defined as using illegitimate means to fulfill legitimate desires. Now I simply see sin as my feeble attempt to fulfill my desires myself. Pride, pleasure, recognition, revenge, all of these are motives that stem from the desire to ‘save’ my *self*. The call of Jesus Christ, indeed the Gospel He preached, is to come to Him and die – lay down the love of self and the energy I use to try and save myself, and instead focus all of my love and energy towards God and others. This is what a life of carrying the cross looks like: selflessness.