

"Bearing the Cross"—John 19:16-17

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Bearing the Cross", is John 19:16-17 → *They took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

What are the "crosses" which you feel you bear in your life? Generally Christians will think of "bearing one's cross" as some kind of suffering with which they must contend on a daily basis. While emotional pain and suffering is a part of "bearing one's cross" it usually involves physical pain of some kind—anything from a chronic pain connected with illness to experiencing persecution. As we view Jesus bearing His cross on our Lenten journey we see the intense physical and spiritual pain which He experienced amidst such persecution.

Throughout the years pictures and movies have depicted Jesus bearing His cross on what has come to be called the "Via Dolorosa." "Via Dolorosa" literally means "the sorrowful way" or "the way of grief." It is the traditional path going through Jerusalem thought to be that which Jesus traveled as He bore His cross to Mt. Calvary. Usually He is

pictured as collapsing under the weight and burden of His cross along the way. Scripture does not record this collapsing while bearing His cross to crucifixion. Our text simply states that *He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull*. However, the other Gospels tell us of a man called Simon of Cyrene bearing the cross of Jesus for Him. (cf. Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) This appears to be the only act of mercy displayed toward Jesus recorded in the Scriptures while traveling the Via Dolorosa.

We know from extra-Biblical sources that whenever criminals were sentenced to death by crucifixion under the Roman government part of their punishment was to carry their own instrument of death. They were made to travel the longest distance on their way to the place of execution so that as many people as possible could see them as public examples of what happens to law breakers. Thus the two criminals were also *led away to be put to death with Him . . . one on His right and one of His left*. (cf. Luke 23:32-33) It was also part of the suffering and humiliation involved with their sentence since it was considered very degrading and contemptible by everyone.

If Jesus did collapse while bearing His cross, thus forcing Simon to carry it for Him, it would be understandable. Very likely His physical strength had been “sapped” by this time after having been beaten, “knocked around” by the soldiers who placed the crown of thorns on His

head and quite possibly having had nothing to eat since the Passover meal shared with His disciples the day before.

However, the burden of bearing this cross is actually a carry-over from His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before. He told His disciples in Matthew 26:38 → *My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.* “The cup” with which Jesus was struggling as He prayed to His heavenly Father was the suffering which He was about to undergo because of our sins. It was the suffering of hell itself. The burden of the sin of the whole world which weighed so heavy on His soul is the real load under which Jesus staggered on this road. Isaiah 53:4-5 describes it this way: *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.* Jesus was led away to be crucified as a common criminal to the place where the ultimate burden of that cross would truly be felt by Him.

Because Jesus bore that cross in our sins we have forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation and also a connection to that same “cross bearing” this side of heaven by faith in Him. This happens in numerous ways:

- ① The suffering of the cross you bear can be the burden of guilt because of your actual sins. What is it like when you feel the weight,

the conviction and the emotional torment in guilt over your sins? Have you ever found yourself constantly struggling for peace in your life only to find more fights waging in your mind? Such conviction on your sins by the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-11) will even find expression consciously or sub-consciously by breeding more sins in your life. Jesus bore His cross so that you need no longer carry the burden of guilt over your sins. He provided the perfect sacrifice before which you can kneel in submissive repentance and experience the burden of guilt completely lifted. Remember the promise: *upon Him was the chastisement that brought you peace, and with His wounds you are healed!* (cf. Isaiah 53:5) The way to peace from the burden of this “cross” is through confession and absolution.

- ② The suffering of the cross you bear can also be from the affects of sinfulness in your life. Many tragedies and sicknesses are not a direct result of any actual sin which you’ve committed but are the result of original sin which affects your life adversely. The road upon which you bear these “crosses” is difficult as the devil tries to get a foothold on you to make you grow weary and lose heart and lose faith in Christ. When’s the last time you felt like your sickness has you rather you having a sickness? When’s the last time you’ve felt captive to the affects of sin in your life and the world around you? According to Luke 4:18 Jesus said He came *to proclaim liberty to the*

*captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.* The way to liberty from the burden of this “cross” of illness and death is trusting in Jesus Who will return on the Last Day to restore all things and bring about the ultimate healing in heaven.

- ③ The suffering of the cross you bear can also be sin expressed in persecution—someone actually trying to harm you because of his/her rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said the world would hate you **because it hates Him**. (cf. John 7:7; 15:18-19) The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that many people of faith *suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword, going about . . . destitute, afflicted, and mistreated.* (cf. Hebrews 11:36-37) Even though *in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood* (cf. Hebrews 12:4), it is still a cross you continue to bear on the path of life as the challenge to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ increases daily. Jesus bore the ultimate persecution when He bore His cross in faithfulness **for you!** Jesus says to you in John 16:33 → *I have said these things to you, that **in Me** you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I **have overcome the world.***

We struggle with this idea of “bearing a cross” by going through suffering, struggles and problems in our lives. It smacks in the face of our American dream of “the good life” getting better and better every day. Yet the road of “the good life” becomes a sorrowful path as people become more and more hard-hearted in their sin, refusing to submit in repentance and believe in Jesus Who bore the cross for the forgiveness of their sins.

The only times that Jesus used the word “cross” was when He spoke to people about their discipleship in relationship to Himself. He says in Luke 14:27 → *Whoever does not bear his own cross and **come after Me** cannot be My disciple.* Bearing your “crosses” in life is a necessary part of discipleship. Thus, faith in Christ places the cross into a whole new perspective. Faith views it as the place where my burdens are lifted and my heart blinded by sin is opened to see and trust in Jesus. Faith focuses on Jesus’ “sorrowful way” instead of my own “sorrowful way” because the cross He bore completely overshadows any cross I could ever bear. He bore the cross in order to bring you into relationship with God’s love, grace, forgiveness and salvation! Amen.

Jesus says to all, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and **follow Me.**”*

(Luke 9:23)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.