

"Take Up Your Cross"

Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're looking at the Lord's challenge to take up our cross and follow Him.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

Jesus was just 33 years old when he decided to take up a cross and die. He was in the prime of life and health. He was doing so much good and had everything to live for!

Jesus was not given a cross; He took it up! He chose it! He didn't want to suffer on the cross no. That Mark 14:34 to 36 says: And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

The commitment Jesus made to follow His Father's will was permanent; there was no quitting or turning back. Jesus took up His cross to die for you and for me. The Lord said in John 10:17 to 18, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

Now this is an important study on the cross of Christ. It's part of a series, "Take Up Your Cross"; and we offer it free! If you'd like a copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website, available to the world, at www.searchtv.org. And you can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, read from Luke 9:23 to 26, and explore what it means to take up your cross at first and daily.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke chapter 9 verse 23 to 26 and we will be listen to the words of Jesus our Lord Himself as He gives us the greatest challenge of life.

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

That's a reading from God's holy word. Spoken by the mouth of Jesus our Lord. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father give us the strength to deny ourselves, take up our cross and to follow Your Son all of our days. We're thankful Father that He bore the cross for us and Father help us to do our part in Your service. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

When the Romans crucified a slave or criminal, they put a wooden beam on the victim's neck and bound to his arms. The slave was then required to march through the neighborhood with a sign proclaiming his crime. They intended to humiliate the transgressor. The phrase "to bear or carry the cross" was the phrase used in describing what's taking place here during the punishment—the victim is literally bearing the cross to the place where he was crucified. In Luke 9, we learned we too must take up a cross—it may not be like the one that Jesus bore, but it is a cross.

You might ask how we first take up a cross, our cross. The answer lies in Romans 6:1 to 7. Here Paul was reminding the Romans of their need to put away their old sins and live the new life that God had given them. Paul explains, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."

When you repent, you're intentionally deciding to leave the old life behind and to take on a new life in Christ.

When you're baptized into the death of Christ and your old self is crucified with Christ, you're taking up a cross. When you're baptized, your sins are washed away, by the blood of Christ, and you're set free from sin. Now you must die with Christ if you wish to be raised up with Christ. When you're baptized, you're raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so that you might walk in newness of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new (creature or new) creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Now Paul knew that denying himself required spiritual discipline. He knew that he couldn't please himself and serve the Lord. He knew that he needed to keep his body under control in order to win the prize. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:2 to 27, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (or rejected)" Paul didn't think he was above exercising in spiritual ways. He denied his fleshly desires and exercised his spiritual life to serve the Lord. And though he was a preacher, he didn't want to be disqualified.

Paul knew the consequences of sin. You see he wrote in Romans 8:12 to 13 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Dying to ourselves means ceasing to live for fleshly pleasures and our own desires. Jesus first put away His own will and took on the will of the Father. It was this focus that allowed Him to endure His cross. We too have to set aside what our hearts desire and turn to what God wills for us. Jesus had always lived for the will of the Father during his lifetime. And it was natural for Him to set aside His own will for the Father's will.

Now Jesus knew before He took up the cross that He would suffer great pain to take away the sins of the world. He offered His body and His blood as a sacrifice, the just for the unjust, so that we might be saved and have eternal life. Now this was no easy decision. Matthew 26:37 and 8 tells us of His suffering at Gethsemane. And how He told Peter and the sons of Zebede that, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Have you ever faced something so dreadful that you wanted to die rather than face it?

Jesus was willing to be falsely accused and condemned by jealous men who wanted Him dead. Jesus was willing to suffer spit, slaps to the face, slander, lies, and humiliation. He suffered a crown of thorns, ridicule, scourging, and crucifixion. Everything He valued was put to an open shame. He did the

Father's will, because it was the right thing to do. He bore the cross because He loved the Father, loved people, and wanted to bring salvation to this world. We would have no hope at all if Jesus hadn't been willing to take up His cross. Have you taken up yours?

Have you taken up your cross today? You know Christianity is a life-long commitment to the Lord and His teaching and His ways. When we commit to the Lord, we also commit to His church. You can't embrace the Lord and reject the church. It's not possible. Remember He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20 and verse 28); He is the head of His body today, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22 to 23); and He is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Now the saved are in the church not out of it. If you wish to be saved, then you must be a member of His church.

When we obey the Lord in faith, repentance and baptism, the Lord adds us to His church. Now the church is described in the Bible and how it was made up of identifiable congregations. When we unite with Christ, we unite with His church. And that means that we owe loyalty to the congregation and to its leaders where we live. We need faithful brothers and sisters to help us get to heaven, and they need us. We're either helping or hurting others. When we refuse to worship with the church, we may be influencing others to give up on Christ.

Paul described his life in Galatians 2 and verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Being crucified with Christ allows Christ to live in us by faith. Since He gave Himself for us, we should be willing to give ourselves up to Him. It's only when we lose our life for His sake that we find it. You can't be saved by holding on to the old ways of sin and selfishness.

You must give selfishness up for something much better, a life of faith in Christ. "We love because He first loved us (1 John 4 verse 19). 2 Corinthians 5:14 to 15 explains, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

Now taking up a cross daily means attention to our commitment and devotion to the Lord. It means attending church regularly, even when I am tired or there are other activities. It means giving generously when opportunities arise, even when it means a sacrifice. It means keeping obligations, even when I don't want to. It means speaking up for Christ, even when it runs against the tide. It means using my abilities to teach people about Jesus Christ. It means doing what is right even if no one stands with me.

I realize churches are made up of fallible people; but the church's head is Jesus Christ; and He is infallible. The Lord Jesus knew the church would be filled with imperfect people. Before Jesus was arrested, He knew how the twelve apostles would react. One betrayed Him, one denied Him, and all of them scattered. Jesus faced the cross alone but He didn't give up on them or on us. And we shouldn't give up either. Jesus showed grace when we didn't deserve it, and we should show grace to others who don't deserve it too. Jesus forgave us because of who He is. And if we're sons of God, we'll show grace and forgive others (Matthew 5:43 to 48).

Now taking up a cross doesn't mean that we lay it down when it gets hard to bear—Jesus didn't quit bearing the cross when people mistreated him or when the cross was agonizing! He didn't come down from the cross, when they taunted Him. 1 Peter 2:21 to 24 says, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, (that is

spoken against) he did not revile in return; but when he suffered, he didn't threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (or righteously). He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, (that is the cross) that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." We too can entrust ourselves to God. 1 Peter 4 and verse 19 says, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

Now instead of getting angry or getting even with others, Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father. When people, even other Christians, treat us shamefully and cruelly, it shouldn't surprise us. When we decide to deny ourselves and take up a cross daily, people will mistreat us like they mistreated Jesus. And just as Jesus didn't give up, neither should we.

1 Peter 4:12 to 14 says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Verse 16 says that, "if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

Romans 8:31 to 39 asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Denying ourselves, taking up the cross daily, and following the Lord has often cost much; but it's worth it. Paul said in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And he explains in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Oh, heaven is surely worth it all. This life is brief, but heaven will last forever and ever.

Let us pray. Father we're thankful that the Lord Jesus was willing to bear the cross for us. Help us to bear our own cross and to live for You. To deny ourselves and to everyday put You first and to follow You. This is Your will and our pleasure and we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Luke 14:25 to 27 says, "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'" Being a Christian means putting the Lord first, turning from a selfish life to a life of service. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." It's only when we lose ourselves, that we have the opportunity to find Jesus as Lord and Savior.

When was the last time that you took a long, close look at the cross of Christ to see just how much the Lord loves you? He offers His hand and His heart to you and asks you to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Him. You see He wants to be united to you. And you can be united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection, when you're baptized into Christ. He will wash away your sins, add you to His church, make you His child, and give you an inheritance in heaven. He wants to abide with you for life and eternity. Will you put your trust in Him? Will you deny yourself, take up your cross today, and follow Him? Now just as Jesus decided to do the Father's will, so you must decide. Will you come to Him?

We pray that today's study about taking up your cross has stirred you consider the Lord's challenge. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message or the booklet "Take Up Your Cross," mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now there's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. Now you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And be sure to like the programs you watch and hit that notification button; now this helps spread the program. And we also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Now everyone needs a church family. And I realize that some of you for health reasons cannot attend worship; I'm speaking to those who can attend and haven't been. There's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one and we want to. Just let us know. Now we'll be back next week, Lord willing. We want you to keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Many have been doing that and they have been coming to a church. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.