

The Indispensable Cross Adornment.

Text: Mat 16:21-26

Suggested Hymns:

54, 171, 340, 282a, 352

1) Glorifying In The Cross Of Christ

2) Taking Up Daily The Cross Of Self-Denial

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 16:21-26, *²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The cross was once a symbol of suffering and shame. The worst criminals were executed by crucifixion. Yet, strangely, the cross has become the emblem of victory and life. The Redeemer of the world has effected this transformation. Jesus brought life to the world by His death on the Cross. Therefore we can joyfully sing, "In the Cross of Christ I glory."

The cross made of silver or gold has become an adornment. Many people wear the cross proudly, and that is commendable. Thereby they confess their faith, letting the world see where they stand. But such outward wearing of the cross is not essential. Many Christians do not wear a cross.

The cross can be worn externally by hypocrites, too. What is essential, however, is that everybody be internally, or spiritually, adorned with the Cross. Faith in Christ who died on the Cross, and that alone, renders a sinner acceptable to God. Whoever does not appear in such adornment before God will eventually be cast into outer darkness. The Cross is, moreover, the power behind that self-denial which characterises and adorns a genuine disciple of Christ.

Let us consider, *The Indispensable Cross Adornment*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Glorifying In The Cross Of Christ

The disciples, with Peter as their spokesman, had made the great confession, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***¹ It was in answer to Christ’s question, ***“But who do you say that I am?”*** And Jesus felt the time had now come when He could definitely tell His disciples of the many things He must suffer to carry out His work as “the Christ.” This suffering would find its climax in His death on the Cross.

But Peter is not at all satisfied with the prospect. ***“See, we have left all and followed You.”***² If what you tell us should happen, he feels, then our dreams of a kingdom will lie shattered in the dust. He has the boldness to rebuke Christ. ***“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”*** You see, the thought of Christ’s suffering and dying is an offence to Peter. He had seen Jesus and pictured Him in an altogether different role — that of Lord, Conqueror, and King in a worldly realm.

How many, like Peter, to this day are offended by a suffering, dying, and crucified Lord! Leader, Teacher, Pattern, yes, but a Saviour, who atoned for men’s sins by sacrificing Himself on the Cross — never!

And why are people offended by the Cross of Christ? For one thing, they find it humiliating, galling to human pride to be told that Christ had to suffer this to free them from sin. They point to their own works, their own righteousness. These they love to see exalted. Such people know neither the enormity of sin nor the holiness and righteousness of God.

The Christian religion, the religion of the Cross, calls for repentance. People must realise their sinfulness. They must learn that sin offends a holy and

righteous God. Our God has been speaking to the world through the severe scourge of war and terrorism. There is one conflict after another. One bombing after another. God has been calling mankind to repentance. The heart-rending reports of people killed and wounded certainly call for contrition and repentance.

Coarse transgressions of God's Law by the godless are common. There is also indifference to God, and His Word and Sacraments, in many churches. We must repent and confess our iniquity with truly humble hearts. Heartily sorry for our sins, hating them, we must turn to the crucified Christ, for whose sake God will forgive us our sins. That, however, offends many people.

They say that they cannot accept the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement. They say it would be unjust on the part of God to have His innocent Son die in the place of the sinner. Besides — so they argue — the innocent blood of one dying in the stead of another cannot cleanse the real culprit of his sins nor obtain life for him.

But is not that precisely the teaching of Holy Scripture? Are not those who find this doctrine offensive flying in the face of God's holy Word? Are they not presuming to criticise instead of humbly and gratefully accepting God's gracious and glorious method of redeeming lost and condemned mankind? Truly, it is Satan who instils such offence into the human heart, and it expedient that everyone turns upon it whenever and wherever it stirs, as Jesus does in our text, saying, ***“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”***

Moreover, the position of the ungodly who want to nullify Christ's Cross is not so reasonable as they would make it appear. To a large extent we benefit every day by the sacrifices of others. Our modern conveniences, our freedoms, our institutions were passed down to us. Others worked, sacrificed, and died to obtain them. Think of the sacrifice of a mother for her child, a soldier for his country, parents giving their children — who is benefited?

Yet it is a shocking fact that even many so-called Christian preachers are among those to whom the blessed Cross of Christ is an offence. Instead of proclaiming the Gospel they deny it. Oh, yes, they speak of the Cross of Christ, but it is not the vicarious, atoning, redeeming Cross.

Truly, as written in 1 Peter 2:8, Christ is ***“A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.”*** ***They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.*** The stern rebuke of the Lord in our text, ²⁵ ***“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it,*** should pierce their hearts and move them to repentance!

Suppose Jesus had followed Peter’s advice. He would then not have saved His life, but would have lost it. He had come into the world to do His Father’s will, to save that which was lost. That called for suffering, death on the Cross, as the Prophets and Christ Himself had foretold.

“You shall bruise His heel.”³ ***“He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded.”***⁴ ***“Behold the Lamb of God.”***⁵ ***“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”***⁶ You see, it had to be the way of suffering, the way of the Cross. Only so would Christ carry out God’s plan of salvation.

Know, too, that it is the crucified Christ who gained salvation for us and for all people. It is the ***“Lamb of God,”*** who takes away the sin of the world. It was on the Cross that the Saviour could cry out, ***“It is finished,”*** His work of redemption complete. Jesus’ resurrection on the third day is positive proof that the Father has accepted the sacrifice brought by His Son for the reconciliation of the world.

And so Peter can write in 1 Peter 2:24, ²⁴ ***who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed.*** And again, ***knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ...***¹⁹ ***but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.***⁷

Will you, then, be offended by the Cross of Christ? This is your way of salvation, the only way. Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, ¹⁸ ***For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***

May it be yours to confess: *“In the Cross of Christ I glory.”* To us who are saved the preaching of the Cross is the power of God. Jesus says in Matthew 11:6, ⁶ *“And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*

2. Taking Up Daily The Cross Of Self-Denial

Having spoken to His disciples of the necessity of His own Cross, Christ now proceeds to tell them that they, too, must walk the way of the cross. *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself.* — Let him deny “himself,” his old nature, his carnal desires, the things which he would naturally love.

It may be giving up sinful pleasure, wrongful gain, position, popularity, a friend who would lead you away from God. Such self-denial might call for dissension in one’s own home.

Jesus says Matthew 10:35-36, ³⁵ *“For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’;* ³⁶ *“and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’*

Self-denial calls for control of passion at all cost. We read in Matthew 5:29-30, ²⁹ *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.* ³⁰ *“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

Again, *“If any man will come after Me, let him ... take up his cross.”* This cross may be bitter persecution for Christ’s sake, mockery, or any suffering, affliction which the Lord permits to come into our lives. We read in 2 Timothy 3:12, ¹² *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Everything that tends to crucify your self-will is the cross that you must bear for Christ’s sake and in His following. Every suffering with Jesus and for Jesus is a cross. Let him take up “his” cross. We are not to choose it. Self-imposed sacrifices are an abomination to God.

God Himself selects the proper cross for you. From a great variety of crosses He chooses the one best suited to your needs. Nor are we to make envious comparisons.

Jesus told Peter one day, *“when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”* Then Peter, seeing John, asks, *“But Lord, what about this man?”* ²² *Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”*⁸

Self-denial and the cross offends people. Some feel that when they embrace the Christian religion they should be exempt from trials. “Why should this happen to me?” When the rich young man is told by Jesus to sell what he has and give it to the poor and follow Him, he goes away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.⁹ He could not love the Saviour that much.

And yet, it is necessary that followers of Christ deny themselves, that they bear their cross. They must lose this life if they would have eternal life. When a person, to save this temporal life, gives up Christ and His doctrine, he has lost true life here and eternal life hereafter.

Peter tried that the night he denied His Lord. He tried to save this life. But where would Peter be, had not the Lord graciously recalled Him? Why is it so difficult for many people to see the value of true religion? They are carnally minded and look to the material things. *“Take care of self,”* that is their principle.

For them it doesn't make sense to abandon temporary satisfactions for what they consider the uncertain realities of tomorrow. The only safe way is to keep what they have, they feel, and get the most out of the tangible, material things within reach.

However, Jesus warns that even though one gained the whole world by forfeiting his soul, he has made a bad bargain. This life is *“soon cut off, and we fly away.”*¹⁰ The first parents did not deny themselves, and see what it brought them and the world!

In choosing luxurious Sodom, what did Lot gain? What did Judas gain by his thirty pieces of silver? What did the rich man gain, though he could clothe himself in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day?

On the other hand, Joseph walked his appointed way of self-denial and the cross, and look at his life! Moses rejected the pleasures of sin.¹¹ Consider his life!

Denial of self and the cross is difficult? Yes. An offence to many? Yes. And yet this is necessary. Scripture says in Romans 8:5-6, ⁵ *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, ... For to be carnally minded is death.*

From these things — worldly desires, worldly ambitions — Christ has redeemed us. We read in Romans 6:6, ⁶ *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.* And in Galatians 6:14, ¹⁴ *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

You see how necessary our cross is. Not that we merit anything by it — we are saved by grace alone — but accepting Christ's salvation means, too, that we shun those things which caused our Saviour's death.

Shall we, then, be offended by the cross which Christ's followers must bear on earth? The Apostle James exhorts, ² *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*¹²

We are to set our affections on things which are above. We are to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt and where thieves cannot break in and steal. When we grow weary in the battle, let us look to Jesus who fought and conquered for us.

Then we, too, shall be able to say with Paul at last, in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the*

righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Our blessed Redeemer Himself promises us, ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***¹³ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 16:16

² Matthew 19:27

³ Gen. 3:15

⁴ Isa. 53:3-5

⁵ John 1:29

⁶ John 3:14

⁷ 1 Pet. 1:18-19

⁸ John 21:18, 21-22

⁹ Matt. 19:21-22

¹⁰ Psalm 90:10

¹¹ Heb. 11:23-28

¹² James 1:2-4

¹³ Rev. 2:10