

“Did Jesus Really Mean That? Take Up Your Cross”

Mark 8:34-38 (NLT)

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We are finishing a series on tough things that Jesus said. Did He really mean some of the things he said? Some of the things he said were seemingly just crazy. Well, before we go with these crazy things that Jesus said, let's look at our interesting English language. The following is adapted by an article by Richard Lederer

“Let's face it - English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple. English muffins weren't invented in England or French fries in France...we find that quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

And why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham? If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth? One goose, 2 geese. So one moose, 2 meese? Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend? If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it?

If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? In what language do people recite at a play and play at a recital? Ship by truck and send cargo by ship? Have noses that run and feet that smell? How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, in which you fill in a form by filling it out and in which an alarm goes off by going on.”

So on this Sunday when we recognize graduates. While teachers taught allow this preacher to “praught.”

Jesus said some crazy things...He said, On the third day He would rise again. And He did!!! He said the most ludicrous thing when He said, “Love your enemies!” And yet He meant that. He said Forgive others...with the Bible saying Forgive as Christ has forgiven you. That's tough. And then last week Sarah preached on Jesus saying “Go the Extra Mile!” Crazy. Enough to go the one mile, but to go that miracle mile of love? Can we really do that? Did Jesus really mean that?

Today we conclude our sermon series with the crazy, absurd statement where Jesus said, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Did He really mean that? What does that mean? How can we do that?

When Jesus said “Take up your cross and follow me,” the image of the cross was one of death. The criminal carried his cross in a painful humiliating way. People along the way making fun, perhaps even spitting and calling names to the one carrying the cross (or the cross beam).

So, what does it mean? And did Jesus really mean it? Take up your cross does not mean to take up a burden. Often, we hear when someone has a physical issue, or a certain ongoing troublesome situation to say, “Well, it must be my cross to bear.” Don’t really believe that is what Jesus meant.

A word cloud of religious terms in various sizes and orientations. The most prominent words are 'LOVE' at the top, 'HOPE' in the middle, and 'JESUS' at the bottom. Other visible words include 'GRATITUDE', 'POWER', 'MERCY', 'STRATEGY', 'SAFETY', 'TRUTH', 'SALVATION', 'HEALING', 'AUTHORITY', 'DEATH', 'SELF', 'FORGIVENESS', 'FAITH', 'TRUMP', 'THE', 'BLOND', and 'WEAPON'. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, with some words appearing in all caps and others in title case.

We always need to look at scripture in context. The verses right before the passage that was read this morning had Jesus telling His disciples that He must suffer, be rejected, and be killed. The disciple Peter took exception to that. In fact, an astonishing statement in verse Mark 8:32 is “Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.” Imagine pulling Jesus, the Son of God aside and reprimanding Him??? Wowzers. Jesus’ response is “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.””

As we leave this verse up on the screen let's look at several things. You may want to take some notes. We will highlight a few things. First, notice the quote begins with "IF." If there is an If then there must be a then or an understood then. So, the question Jesus asks then as now is "If" any of you wants to be my follower...insert the understood then. If any of you wants to be my follower then you....

Let's pause and reflect for just a second. And don't raise your hand on this. Who wants to be a follower of Jesus? Now my guess here is that most people here would raise their hand. Not so fast. You see following Jesus is easy when things are going nice, well, and smooth. Sure, I will follow Jesus. But what about when things are going rough and tough? Do you still want to follow? Is Christ enough?

Now in that verse notice the 3 things He asks a follower to do. 1. You must give up your own way. And we often act like a child and with a whiny voice say, "But I don't want to." If we are to be a follower, we must give up our own way. Not my way, but Thy way. Not your way, but Yah Weh (see what I did there). If you give up your own way does that mean you give up your hopes and dreams? Well what if you replace your hopes and dreams with the hopes, dreams, and plans that Jesus has for you. Put to death your own plans and desires and turn everything over to Jesus. Really? Yep? Did Jesus mean that? Yep? Isn't that hard? Double Yep. Yep. Yep.

If we want to follow Jesus we must give up your own way and here it is: Take up your cross. We are to give up our own way and die to self. That cross is a symbol of death, both in first century and now. But here it is death of the one carrying the cross. Oh, not perhaps a physical death, but a death of our will to God's will. Jesus really meant it.

Jesus says, (1) Give up your own way. (2) Take up your cross. (3) Follow. Follow where? Well, some of our graduates will be going from our 8th grade to various High Schools. Some our High School graduates will be entering the work force or pursuing college. Our college graduates will follow into their field of study. But in all of those plans...are they our plans, or God's plans. Take up your cross means to die to self.

Going on in our scripture notice these verses: **36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? 37 Is anything worth more than your soul?**

Let me put it bluntly to graduates. What do you benefit if you graduate and pursue your goal and lose your faith and do not follow Jesus? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Now I want to celebrate graduates. I commend them. For some it may have seemed easy. For some it was more difficult. Some at the end of High School or college have a bit of fear as to the next step. Congratulations to all graduates on getting your diploma.

So, to the college graduates we have a Seminole, a Gator, a Shark, and a Kentucky Wildcat.

Our high schoolers we have a Gibbs Gladiator (**image**) an Anclote Shark (**image**), a Land of Lakes Fighting Gator (**image**), a Tarpon Spring Sponger (**image**), and the Palm Harbor University High School Hurricanes (**image**). And our very own Westlake Christian School Eagles (**image**).

Now I like the Eagles mascot name. In part because I am an Eagle. My college mascot was an Eagle (**image**).

Now some of you know this, but if you thought Sponger or Gladiator was a strange name for a High School, my high school has been ranked nationally as one of the strangest nicknames' mascots of all time. Currently my former High School in Centralia, Illinois has only 900 students. Yes, here is our mascot **(image)**. The Centralia Orphans. My dad was an Orphan, my brother was an Orphan, and I am an Orphan. (Think about that.) However, the mighty Orphans are also known for something else. As least as late as 2016 the Centralia Orphans basketball team had won over 2100 games making it the number 1 winningest high school basketball team in the nation. Oh, yes let me show the girls teams mascot. **(image)** Yes, The Orphans, and the Orphan Annie's!!!

I'm glad to say that although I'm an Orphan, I am actually a child of God. You see it is more than just mascots and diplomas. Check this wall out. **(image of wall full of diplomas)**. Now diplomas or good. I have diplomas and certificates on my wall. You have worked hard for them. In one sense you earned them and deserved them. Great job. But there is more to life than a diploma...I don't care if you are graduating 8th grade, high school, or college. In fact, let me be so bold as to say to everyone here the greatest degree you can have is a B.A. Degree.

B. (born) A. (again) Degree

All of the diplomas and accolades that graduates receive. Promotions and raises and honors that those within our congregation may have received...are really nothing, if in the mean time we have "gained the whole world," climbed the corporate or educational ladder, and have lost our spirituality and connection to Jesus.

As if that is not enough. And Jesus meant what He said. He then says this: **38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

69 times Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man. This refers to prophecy in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14) as well as the fact that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine.

Certainly, we would not want Jesus to be ashamed of us. And here is the rub. It is easy to be shining for Jesus here on this campus. But at the work place, at the next school, in our neighborhood among our friends are we not ashamed of being a follower of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way: **Romans 1:16 New Living Translation (NLT) 16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.**

Good News about Christ! Woo-hoo!!!! It is the power of God. The God who created the universe, the God who makes the sun rise and set, the God who aligns the planets---the power of that God is at work---in you! It is He who is saving you.

Did Jesus really mean when He said "Take up cross." Yes, deny self and let Jesus shine through. When people see what you do, when people hear what they say are they seeing and hearing a little bit of Jesus in you.

We all have choices we make every day. Have you chosen to deny yourself? Have you chosen made the decision to follow Jesus? What good is the whole world if you lose your soul? Education, diplomas, wealth, success will never completely satisfy. What will truly satisfy is your relationship with Jesus.

Give up your own way. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus.

(11:05 Is He the King of your heart? Is He your wind that propels you through life? When life gets tough is Jesus your anchor? Is that burning and passion in you Jesus...King of your heart? He will never ever let you down. Let me say it again, we may be down, but Jesus will never, ever let you down.)