

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” **This is God’s Word for our consideration.**

Dear Fellow Followers of the Cross,

Have you ever noticed, As we grow older, we don’t like change. I have to admit, I like things the way they are, especially if things seem to be going well. That’s how it was with the disciples. Things were going well but as Jesus spoke these words, he was trying to prepare his disciples for the changes that were coming.

There would be a big change as Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Laws and established a new covenant with his people. There would be a big change as Jesus completed his mission of bringing us salvation and then left his disciples to continue his ministry. And as people are brought to faith there is always a big change in their lives as they turn from following the world to following Christ.

As we consider the idea of change and this portion of scripture, we want to take a look at, **“The Cross of Christ which has changed our lives,”** and then also **“The Cross of Christ’s Followers which Jesus reminds us that we will carry as we follow him.”**

I. The Cross of Christ which has changed our lives. This was necessary for God’s plan of salvation but it included a lot more than the wooden cross on which Jesus was crucified. That’s what Jesus was trying to explain to his disciples when he said, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things.”** This wasn’t something new. They knew the Old Testament prophecies about the Savior.

Isaiah described our Savior’s suffering in a number of different ways, **“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”** (Isaiah 50:6). He also wrote, **“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.”** (Isaiah 53:5). Suffering was only part of the cross that Jesus bore for us. Jesus tells us he would be, **“rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law.”** The ones

who should have defended Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises would condemn him. This too, had been written about in the Old Testament.

The writer of Psalm 118 noted, **“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”** (Psalm 118:22) as he described how Jesus, who was rejected, was to become the most important part of our salvation – he would be the capstone – the one who holds it all together.

But the Cross of Christ included more. It included the fact that Jesus would die. The devil would strike Jesus' heel as Jesus suffered under the weight of the sins of the world and as he died, but never forget the words Jesus uttered just before he died, **“It is finished.”** The price for our sins was steep, but the price was paid in full. Jesus died, but he rose victorious on Easter morning to declare that he had overcome sin, death, and the devil for us!

We don't like to dwell on the suffering and death of Christ because it reminds us of our own sins, however that is something we need to hear. It helps us understand why our Savior had to go to the cross and it helps us to see the depth of his love for us. It helps us realize that the cost of salvation is not cheap but it comes to us as a precious gift through faith.

Jesus spoke plainly about this to his disciples. He wanted them to understand what was going to happen, but they didn't want to hear about their Lord and Savior suffering and dying any more than we do. That is why Peter took Jesus aside and scolded him. All they had to do was stay away from Jerusalem and Jesus would be safe. Things were going well. Why was Jesus talking this way?

We would have to say that at this point, Peter was championing the cause of Satan. Satan didn't want to see Jesus go to the cross. Satan used whatever he could to try and win. If Satan could keep Jesus out of Jerusalem and away from the cross he could avoid that final showdown and he would win, but Jesus had no trouble recognizing what was behind Peter's attempt to dissuade him and with his words, **“Get behind me Satan!”** he emphasized that the final showdown in Jerusalem would happen.

Just as Satan used Peter to try and draw Jesus away from the cross, he also uses whatever he can to try and draw us away from the 'Cross of Christ.' The Cross is a key part of our salvation. Without it we wouldn't have any salvation.

We live in a world that does not like to talk about sin. We live in a world that does not like to talk about hell, yet sin and hell are very real and if we don't acknowledge our sin and our need for a Savior, we will end up in hell. That is something we don't want for ourselves – that is something we don't want for our friends and relatives and neighbors and everyone else we know.

So we talk about the cross and the suffering of our Savior, because once we understand the seriousness of our sin, we can appreciate all the more, the love of our Savior found in the “Good News” that our sins are forgiven – Jesus paid for them all on the cross.

II. And as we realize the love of our Savior shown on the cross that will move us to want to follow our Savior and live our lives for him. Those that follow Jesus carry a cross too, but it is not a wooden cross – it is not a cross on a chain around your neck – it is a cross that Jesus describes for us in the last verses of our text. It is the **“Cross of Christ’s Followers.”**

Jesus has three distinct commands for those who want to follow him. The first command is to deny yourself. You might think that denying yourself fits pretty good with the season of Lent because there are a number of people that give up stuff for Lent, but that’s not what Jesus had in mind when he said, **“To deny yourself.”**

To deny yourself means to refuse to make yourself the sole object in your life. To deny yourself means to make sacrifices. To avoid those things that would come between you and your Savior. To deny yourself means to make changes in your life as you try to avoid those sinful influences all around you. As you make changes you will probably suffer persecution and ridicule for your faith and for the lifestyle that comes as a result of that faith and that takes us to the second command – take up your cross.

To take up your cross is to be willing to bear the burden of being a Christian. For followers of Jesus, our crosses are every hardship or difficulty that we suffer because of our faith in Jesus. The cross might be verbal ridicule that people give us because we go to church or believe in God or being disowned from the family because you “switched religions.” The cross may be the loss of a job because it requires you to lie or cheat others. Many are the crosses that a true follower of Jesus experiences in their life.

Jesus third command is to follow him. To focus on the things of God rather than the things of this world. To keep on hearing God’s Word, to study it, and to let it guide you in your life. To obey God’s commands. You might be thinking to yourself, “Is the Christian life worthwhile? Is it really worth it to suffer? Isn’t life hard enough without a cross to carry too” Satan whispers those thoughts in our ears – maybe even shouts them but listen to what Jesus tells us about the cross we might have to bear.

Jesus asks us, **“What good is it for a [person] to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a [person] give in exchange for his soul?”** Possessing the world – going along with the world – is not worth losing one’s soul, but the sad fact is that many are willing to forfeit salvation for even much less.

Value your soul because God certainly does. He values your soul so much that he sent His Son to redeem it. He values your soul so much that he sends the Holy Spirit to create faith in your heart so that you are able to follow your Lord and Savior. God wants you in heaven and yet there are those who reject God and God’s Word. God has a warning for those who ignore him.

He says, **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”** Many people accept the fact that there is a heaven but deny the existence of hell. Hell is a very real place and place where those who reject Jesus as their Savior will end up. It’s a very real place and it is not a place you want to be.

Look to the Cross of Christ. It assures us that our sins have been paid for – it assures us of our salvation. It is a picture of our Savior’s love for us.

Then consider the Cross you carry as you follow your Savior. It is a cross of gratitude that helps you to keep focused on your Savior. It is a cross that our Savior helps us carry. It is a cross that is much easier than our Savior’s cross and yet it shows our love for him and all he has done for us. Amen