

Taking Up Your Cross Daily

Luke 9:23, “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’”

As I often say, “Context is critical,” and it certainly is so regarding Jesus’ challenge here. Given Luke’s stated effort “to write it out... in consecutive order” the gospel account (cf. Luke 1:1-3), we need to understand that Jesus’ words in 9:23 occur fairly early in His public ministry. Though the 5,000 have been fed and several other miracles wrought, and Peter has made the declarative confession that Jesus was indeed “*The Christ of God*” (v.20), the *Transfiguration* and other notable events have not yet occurred. Jesus HAS told His disciples that He would “*be killed, and raised up on the third day*” v.22, but He has NOT told them *how* He would be killed. In fact, according to Luke’s account, this is the first time a “cross” has been mentioned. And significantly, the “cross” to which Jesus refers in v.23 is NOT His own. Think about that...

At the time Jesus issued the requirement for a disciple to “*take up his cross,*” a “cross” had NO SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE- none whatsoever. It was just an implement of death. It was like saying the “electric chair,” the “gas chamber,” or a “lethal injection.” So at this time, the “cross” had no spiritual significance for a simple reason: not only has Jesus not yet died on His “cross,” He hadn’t even disclosed that such would be the implement of His agonizing death. Therefore in Luke 9:23, He’s NOT telling would-be disciples that they must put on or carry some “symbol of Christianity” everyday to display their faith and fidelity to the world, or even to remind themselves of Jesus’ sacrificial death. He IS telling potential followers that they must not only be willing to “die” for Him and His Cause “*daily,*” but that they must be willing to carry their own implement of destruction. Every. Single. Day. Now, think about getting up every morning and embracing and conveying your own implement of death with you all day, everywhere you go, and whatever you do. This, I believe, is not only what Jesus said, but what He meant. Are we not only willing to die for Him and our faith in Him, but also to *daily carry OUR OWN “cross”*?

As jarring and sobering as these words of Jesus must have been to would-be followers both *then* and *now*, it wasn’t and isn’t all that He requires of His disciples. Note that *daily cross taking-up* and *bearing* has both predecessors and successors: (still from Luke 9:23)

1. **All / Anyone-** Jesus is not speaking *privately* to “*the twelve*” here. The following requirements of discipleship were for ANY and ALL who would follow Him.
2. **Wishes-** He’s not talking about “*wishing*” here as we “wish it would rain” but don’t really expect it to do so. “*Wishes*” is translate from the Greek word *thelo*, which here refers to *resolved* and *determined purpose*. This is not some sort of “kind of would like to if it doesn’t cost too much” mere “wish”- but an “all in” desire... even to the point of being willing to absolutely and completely...
3. **Deny Himself-** Unfortunately, most of us think of “Christianity” in terms I/me. “I” get to go to heaven when I die and “my” life here will be filled with blessings and benefits. But Jesus is insisting on “self-denial” rather than “self-promotion” for His disciples. It’s “Christ-ianity” not “Me-ianity.” Those unwilling to “deny self’s”

wants, needs, and purposes for “Christ’s” wants, needs, and purposes need not even apply for the position, let alone show up expecting a “paycheck.”

4. **Take Up His (own) Cross-** Please reread and review paragraph #3 above.
5. **Follow Me-** It’s not *“take up your cross daily, and go about your merry way wherever you want.”* It is, *“take up your cross daily, and FOLLOW ME.”* If we are to truly be His disciples, then we don’t choose the course, pick the path, or determine the destination. He does, because we’re *“denying self”* and *“wish”* to *“follow Him”*- even if it means losing our life on *“our own cross”* we carry *“daily.”*

I hope what Jesus said (or what I’ve written about His words) doesn’t deter you from *“wishing”* and wanting to *“follow”* Him. But if they do, then it’s just as well since these things are precisely what it takes to be His disciple. *“No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,”* Luke 9:62. Please, don’t kid yourself about the “cost” of discipleship- it costs you everything; but it’s worth eternity.

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