

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ **They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”**

²⁹ **“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”

³⁰ **Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.**

³¹ **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. (NIV 84)**

Theme: The Cost of Following Christ doesn't come Cheap.

1. You must take up your cross
2. You must deny yourself.

What is the main motivating factor behind all the advancements in technology? If you think about it, a major motivation is simply to make our lives easier and more comfortable. Think about some of the advancements in the auto industry. It's too hard to keep your foot on the pedal for more than 10 miles? Let's include a button that will do it for you and call it cruise control. It's annoying to reach down and turn a crank to open a window so we'll come up with power windows. You don't want to look in your mirrors or turn your head while backing up, so we'll include a camera or two and a video screen! We are all about living an easy life. We want what is easier, more convenient, and whatever makes us more comfortable. They are even working on cars right now that drive themselves—all we would have to do is sit back and enjoy the ride!

That is the way we want our entire life to be—easy, convenient, and comfortable. And wouldn't that be great if that's what it was like for our lives of faith? It would be great, but that's not how it is in reality.

Jesus was walking along a road north of the Sea of Galilee with his disciples when he asked them, **Who do the people say I am?** It's was a common question back 2000 years ago and it is common question today. In fact along with, “why am I here” and “what is the purpose in life” it is one of the all-important questions in this life: “who is Jesus.” Everyone has to answer that question for himself; but there is only one correct answer. Some of the people in Jesus' day had a good impression of Jesus. Some thought he was John the Baptist, others the second coming of Elijah the prophet, and some others saw him as another one of the prophets, perhaps the one Moses prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18. They had good things to say about him; but they were wrong.

If you ask a random person on the street that question, who is Jesus, you will get a variety of answers. Some say he never existed, but is a figment of the imagination. Others will say he was simply a good man who set the example for us on how to treat other people. There are those who call him a prophet, maybe even the greatest prophet of God. Some claim he is the son of God, but he's not eternal and not co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit and thus not God.

By the grace of God and by the work of the Holy Spirit, you know who Jesus is. You know that he isn't just the Son of God, but God himself—fully God from eternity. And because of this you know that he is also your Savior from sin. That is what Peter confessed when he proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word, Messiah. Both mean the Anointed One, or the chosen one. That is, the one God chose and set aside from before creation to save the world from their sins.

As the Christ, Jesus came to suffer. He told his disciples this again and again. He didn't come down from heaven to this earth to hang out for a while or to see what his creation is like first-hand. No he came with one purpose: to save us. And in order to save us he had to suffer and die in our place. That is what the Old Testament prophets prophesied about, that is what the Lord's will was. That he would suffer and die. Of course he did this on the cross where he suffered

through the guilt of all our sins and the eternal damnation that we deserved. And this emotional pain was far greater than the physical pain he received by the crown of thorns, the beating, flogging, and the crucifixion that happened to him.

Being Christ, being the Savior and following the will of the Lord wouldn't come easy. It wouldn't come cheap. You have heard Jesus' cries of agony on the cross, **My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.** You can almost see and hear the drops of sweat like blood dripping from Jesus' forehead in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prayed to the Father about his suffering and death. Jesus knew it was coming; but he didn't shy away from it or go run and hide. He rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday resolutely heading toward his death, for us.

Obedience to the Lord doesn't come cheap—not for Christ and not for us. Jesus said so, **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** It would be nice if being a Christian was easy and comfortable. It would be nice if our entire lives were blessed and that we enjoyed gift after gift from God in this earthly life simply because we were Christians. It would be great if we never had any problems from anyone because of our faith. But that's not the case. We must carry crosses in our life.

A Christian's cross is anything that you suffer through because of your faith. There are many people who disagree with your confession that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal son of God and the Savior from sin alone. Some are going to take more of an exception to this confession than others. There is a whole group of people who want nothing more than to see you dead because of your faith. Countless Christians are being put to death each year because of their faith in Jesus Christ. But truth be told, here in America, at least in this point of time, your life isn't threatened because of you confess Christ. God has richly blessed and defended our nation. But you still face persecution of a different form—maybe not because you confess Christ but because you stick to all of his teachings. You might get mocked or ridiculed because you don't believe in evolution but that God created the world in six days as he says over and over again his Word. Or you might not get that job or that promotion you want because you asked off for Sundays in order to worship. Some might call you a hateful, unloving bigot or may even take you to court because of your stance on homosexuality. Then are some, perhaps even our own family

members, that will attack your faith and try to get you to go against God's Word in one way or another.

We all have crosses to bear. And each cross is unique. But sometimes it seems as if we don't have much of a cross to carry, or that our burden is light.

And that may be true to some extent. But there is another aspect of following Jesus that also falls under the Christian cross—the denial of self. Jesus explains in verse 35, **whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.** This is something the Christian must do on a daily basis—constantly he must deny himself.

What does it mean to deny yourself? Your sinful nature wants nothing more than to do what it wants to do—whether or not it is contrary to God's Word. By nature you're selfish, you don't want to take care of others in need; you want the newest and the greatest. You want to live a comfortable life and have all the best things for yourself. Your sinful nature doesn't want you to give money to Christ—you should keep some of that money for yourself, you earned it, the Church doesn't really need it after all. Your sinful nature wants to sleep in on Sundays, or go out and party all night. Your sinful nature would rather watch T.V. than read or study God's Word. Your sinful nature would take your kids to a game than to Sunday School. Your sinful nature wants a comfortable, care-free life, one that won't cause people to mock or ridicule you.

The denial of self, then, is denying yourself what your sinful nature wants. It means that you give up things for Christ—things like sleep, fun, or work in order to join God's children in worshiping our Savior together. It may mean that you go without the latest phone, as much in your nest egg, or time with friends and family so that you can support the work of the church and the spreading of the gospel so that others may hear it and believe. It may mean putting aside your wants and desires for those of others, or taking of those in need more than you take care of yourself.

This is something we often fail to do. We often fail in our internal struggle with our pet sins. We want the best of both worlds—we want to be Christians but live the life that we want to live. And we often lose the battle against our sinful nature. We also want to an easy and

comfortable life. No Christian wants to suffer for their faith; no one revels in persecution. So the temptation is to keep our mouths shut, to not share our faith, to not speak up when God's commands are broken by those in society. Instead of carrying our cross after Christ we often run away from it.

Whether we fail to deny ourselves and carry our crosses, or we do carry our cross and suffer persecution the solution is the same. We look up at Christ and his cross. We see him taking our place. We see him not running away from his cross but carrying it to his death. We see our sins upon his shoulders and know that he suffered the eternal consequences for our sins when he was forsaken by the Father. This was the Lord's will, it was necessary for Jesus to suffer at the hands of the Jews and be put to death. Jesus obeyed his will, putting his wants and desires behind the Lord's. And this perfect obedience was credited to us.

So as we look at Christ on his cross we know that our sins have been forgiven. Christ removed them and we have been set free from condemnation. They won't come back to haunt us. We stand as pure and innocent before the Lord who declares us not guilty on account of Christ. And as we suffer through our crosses we know that we are not alone in our suffering, for Christ suffered too on his cross and he able to empathize with us.

And there is another thing we notice when we look up to the cross of Christ: the cross is empty—he's no longer there. And he's no longer in his tomb either. Three days after his death Christ rose from the dead. He defeated sin and death and crushed Satan's head. And his victory over death is given to us.

We know that no matter what happens to us, we are going to be in heaven with our Savior forever. And there is heaven there will be no more crosses, there will be no more need to deny our sinful nature, because there will be no more sin in heaven—along with no more pain or sorrow or anyone to mistreat us because of our faith! And so when our crosses seem too heavy to bear we look forward to the perfect and eternal life that awaits us in heaven. And our crosses are no longer that heavy.

Much of modern technology is often about an easier and more comfortable life. While that might be the ideal, for us as Christians it's not the reality. The reality is that obedience to the Lord doesn't

come cheap. But for him who suffered and died for us we rejoice in our crosses and deny ourselves knowing that because of Christ and his empty cross and grave we'll be in heaven with him forever. Amen.