

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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## LET HIM TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY (2)

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### Luke 9:23

In our last lesson, we were studying the words of our Lord Jesus in Luke 9:23 where He said, *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.* We focused on the command to take up our cross and we discussed the meaning of the cross from the point of view of its power. We said that this power is the resurrected life of Jesus which is at work in us. Every believer is empowered in this way to communicate eternal life to others. When a believer takes up his cross, it is for the purpose of becoming a channel of Jesus' life to other people.

Today we will look at the cross from another angle. We will look at it from the point of view of its glory. Not only there is power in the cross, but there is also a glorious aspect to the cross. We will see how this is expressed in the Bible.

### The cross and Jesus

Now this word 'cross', the Lord Jesus uses it six times. And the interesting thing that we observe is that He never uses it to speak about his own cross. Every time He uses the word 'cross,' He talks about the cross of the disciples, the cross that you and I are asked to carry. Let's look at the six occurrences so that you can see it for yourself:

- Matthew 10:38: *And he who does not take **his cross** and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* This is the cross of the disciple.
- Matthew 16:24: *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.'* The cross of the disciple.
- Mark 8:34: *When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up **his cross**, and follow Me.'* The cross of the disciple.
- Mark 10:21: *Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up **the cross**, and follow Me.'* The cross of the disciple.
- Luke 9:23: *Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up **his cross** daily, and follow Me.'* The cross of the disciple.
- Luke 14:27: *And whoever does not bear **his cross** and come after Me cannot be My disciple.* Again, the cross of the disciple.

## The cross and Paul

On the other hand, when the apostle Paul uses the word ‘cross,’ it is always in reference to the cross of Christ, not to the cross of the believer. Again I would like to read to you all those ten occurrences:

- 1 Corinthians 1:17: *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the **cross of Christ** should be made of no effect.*
- 1 Corinthians 1:18: *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.*
- Galatians 5:11: *And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the **offense of the cross** has ceased.*
- Galatians 6:12: *As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the **cross of Christ**.*
- Galatians 6:14: *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.*
- Ephesians 2:16: *And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through **the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity.*
- Philippians 2:8: *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on **a cross**.*
- Philippians 3:18: *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the **cross of Christ**.*
- Colossians 1:20: *And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of **His cross**.*
- Colossians 2:14: *Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to **the cross**.*

So from these ten verses, we see that when Paul speaks about the cross, it is always with the intention of explaining the effect of the cross of Christ on the life of the disciples.

## Being lifted up

Let’s go back to Jesus and the cross. I think it is important to highlight this other aspect of the cross. When Jesus speaks about taking up the cross, He is not talking about some difficult circumstances in our life. Although hardships of life can sometimes be felt like a crucifixion for a person, this is not what Jesus had in mind. Bad health, job loss, divorce, car accident, bankruptcy, all these problems can be extremely painful to deal with. But this is not what Jesus means by ‘taking up our cross.’ ‘Taking up our cross’ is an action that we determine to do, of our own choice. I choose to take up my cross by the power and grace of God.

This is true also of the Lord Jesus. Jesus never spoke of the cross as some unfortunate event that happened to him. The cross is something that He chose to submit himself to, out of love for us. He said in John 10:17-18, *I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.* ‘I give up my life of my own free will.’

Seeing that Jesus never uses the word ‘cross’ in reference to His own cross, this brings up the following question: does Jesus ever speak about His own cross? It is a very good question. The answer is ‘Yes, He does.’ But He does not use the word ‘cross.’ How does He say it then? What word or expression does He use? Well, here we begin to see something very interesting. Jesus will speak of his crucifixion as an event in which He is being ‘lifted up.’ Jesus did not say that He will be crucified. He

said that He will be ‘lifted up.’ That is the word that He used in John 12:32. *And I, if I be **lifted up** from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.* Then in the following verse, He explains what He means by being ‘lifted up’ from the ground. *He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die* (John 12:33). Jesus will die by being lifted i.e., by being crucified on a pole.

Let me give you two other examples of this expression used by Jesus to describe the manner of his death:

- John 3:14: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be **lifted up**.* ‘The Son of Man will be lifted up.’ He will be crucified.
- John 8:28: *Then Jesus said to them, "When you **lift up** the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.* ‘You will lift up the Son of Man.’ You will crucify the Son of Man.

## Being exalted

So this is an important observation. When Jesus speaks about His death, He will always use the expression ‘lifted up,’ *hupsoo*. But there is something even more interesting about this word *hupsoo*. *Hupsoo* can also mean ‘to be exalted’ or ‘to be glorified.’ Here are a few examples where *hupsoo* is translated by the word ‘exalted.’

Acts 2:33. *Therefore having been **exalted** (hupsoo) to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.* Jesus has been exalted (*hupsoo*) at the right hand of God. We can also say, as we find in certain translations, that He has been ‘lifted up to the right hand of God.’

Acts 5:31. *Him God has exalted (hupsoo) to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* In what sense was Jesus exalted? This verse tells us. God exalted Jesus to be Prince and Savior.

This word *hupsoo* is also applied to us. The believer will be exalted by God when he humbles himself. James 4:10: *Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt (hupsoo) you.* We find the same idea in 1Peter 5:6: *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt (hupsoo) you.*

In total, this word *hupsoo* appears twenty times in the NT. And amazingly, it is sometimes used by the Lord Jesus to speak about his death in terms of glorification. Because for Jesus, the crucifixion was a ‘glorious’ moment. This is what we see when we read John 12:23. *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* The hour has come for the Son of Man to die, which Jesus expressed as ‘being glorified.’ For Jesus, to die on the cross is to be glorified. That is quite a surprising view of the cross, isn’t?

We know the context of this declaration. Immediately after speaking about his death, Jesus goes on to say that if a grain of wheat does not die, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it will produce many seeds. Then He speaks about us. ‘If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me. Where I am, my servant needs to be there also. I am about to die. You will also die.’ If we were there listening to Jesus, I think we would find His words very uncomfortable. Jesus announces that He will soon die. And He says that if I am really His disciple, I will have to follow Him in His death. Here is a fundamental difference between the thinking of Jesus and our thinking. Jesus sees the taking up of His cross as a glorification. How do we see the taking up of our cross? Do we see it as something that brings glory to God or as a burden on our shoulders, as something that will crush us?

## A question of attitude

You know, we sometimes hear Christians say, 'If I had the vision that Paul had on the Damascus Road, I would have grown much more spiritually.' Or, 'If I didn't have the spouse that I have, my spiritual life would be much better.' This is not proper thinking. We should never think that we could somehow be holier if we just had the right context, the right spiritual experience. There are people who have had visions of Christ, and nothing happened to them. There are people who, in spite of their spouse's spiritual downfall, became a wonderful man or woman of God. The difference does not lie in your experiences or your interactions with people. The difference lies in the attitude of your heart. God can transform you immensely if you have the right attitude. But He will not be able to do anything with you if the right attitude is not there.

Think about the example of Elijah. The same man; two different attitudes. Elijah was a mighty servant of God. Remember the spiritual contest that took place on Mount Carmel. Elijah was alone facing the religious establishment of Baal. 450 priests of Baal were standing there together, and Elijah was challenging them. 'If your god is real, let him bring fire on the sacrifice.' So the priests called on the name of Baal from morning till evening ... and nothing happened. Then it was Elijah's turn. As you know, without much fuss, by a simple prayer from Elijah to God, fire came down on the altar. And the whole sacrifice went up in smoke.

Then we say, 'What an impressive prophet of God is this Elijah! Only him can show God's power in this spectacular way.' But notice what happened just a few verses later. Jezebel, the queen, was furious at Elijah. In a message sent to him, she threatened to get him killed within twenty-four hours. What was Elijah's reaction? Suddenly this mighty servant of God became weak. Elijah was so terrified by the threat that he ran to the other side of the country. This is the man who just a moment ago demonstrated that Jezebel's gods had no power at all. What happened? What changed between these two pictures of Elijah? Only one thing changed between the powerful Elijah and the weak Elijah. Only one thing: the change of attitude of Elijah. And this change was caused by the threat. He was focused on his circumstances rather than resting in God for his protection, the God whom he demonstrated the power. There was a fundamental shift in his attitude. And that made him to react very differently.

You know, as a physician, my task is to treat all kinds of people who are affected by a disease or an accident. And sometimes, my patients are left with a permanent disability. I am always amazed to see how, for the same medical problem, the outcome can be very different, depending on the attitude of the patient towards his weakened capacity. The people who do not accept their new condition will almost always develop negative feelings like bitterness, anxiety, insomnia, irritability, hopelessness, anger, a sense of injustice, a lack of motivation. Such an attitude will prevent them from moving forward in their life because these feelings poison their spirit. But there are other people who have a totally different attitude. They come to accept their limitations, their handicap. And that makes the transition towards their new condition so much smoother. It is obvious when we observe them that they made peace with what they have lost, and now they are able to move on and take joy again in their life. Same medical problem; two different outcomes.

Same calamity; two different responses. Remember Job and his wife. After all his losses, Job was still able to say, 'God has given me everything. God has taken everything. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Job's wife had a very different reaction. She said to her husband, 'Why are you still faithful? Curse God and die.'

Same message; different responses. For some people, the word of God produces no fruit. In another person, there is a 30-fold growth. In another person, it is a 60-fold growth. In another, it is a 100-fold growth. It is the same word, the same God, the same power. Where lies the difference? It is in the soil, in the difference of attitude. We can say that God's power is limited by us, by our attitude.

## Taking up our cross with the right attitude

What is your attitude towards the cross? How do you see the taking up of your cross? For Jesus, His death was a glorious event. That is why He does not use the word cross to refer to His death. When He talks about His crucifixion, He has in mind a 'glorification.' 'When I am glorified,' He said. Hebrews 12:2 gives us more insight into Jesus' perception of the cross. This is what we read. *Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who **for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...*** There was a joy that He was looking forward to. That helped Him to endure the cross. He rejoices in the cross, not because He likes suffering, but because of what will be accomplished by the cross, i.e., the redemption of mankind. The cross, for Jesus, is a source of glory. It is also a source of joy.

It is this attitude that allowed Paul to say, 'I have suffered the loss of everything and I count it as garbage' (Philippians 3.8). Because for Paul, there is glory in suffering with Christ. It is a privilege to walk with his Lord on the path of suffering. In fact, the cross of Jesus is the only thing that he glories in as a believer. This is what he says in Galatians 6:14: *But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* Paul glories in the cross of Christ because of what the cross has accomplished in his life. Through the cross, he has been cut off from the world and the world to him. With this kind of believer, God is gloried.

This is also the attitude that we should have when we take up our cross. We see it as a source of glory for God. How is that possible? Because it is through this cross that life is going out to others. Eternal life is being channeled towards other people. As we die like this grain of wheat, we see with joy the harvest coming up. The life of God is passing through us into the lives of others. Can you see God's glory in this? If we do see God's glory, we will not hesitate. We will take up our cross and allow His glory to be manifested in each one of our lives.