

Meeting With Christ

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 (1)

Luke 9:23

I think it is fair to say that Christianity is a religion of power, a religion in which there is power. Christianity being a religion of power, we can also say that Christians are people who have power. Paul writes in 2Timothy 3:5 that in the last days, there will come people who have a form of godliness but in reality, they will ‘deny its power.’ For Paul, there is power in Christianity, and Christianity without power is not true Christianity. If that is the case, where is this power to be found? We can say in one sentence that the power of Christianity is found in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Today we will return to the words of Jesus in Luke 9:23 and this time we will focus on the topic of the cross. Luke 9:23 reads like this.

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.’

Power and Christianity

We mentioned in our previous lesson that the action of ‘denying oneself’ has to do with the rejection of our egocentric way of thinking. Every person has a natural inclination to think mostly about himself. That has to change by the resurrection power of Jesus. Selfishness has to leave. Imagine what would happen if a person is not changed, and he wants this power that the Bible talks about. He would be a very dangerous person to have around. Remember the story of Simon Magus who tried to buy this power from the Apostles? Acts 8:18-19: *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

Simon did not get this power. A person who is only longing for power will not get it, not until the cross purifies his heart. In fact, if you have any selfish motive, God will destroy it through the cross. Here is the wisdom of God. He takes the selfishness of man and destroys it with that very selfishness. Strange, isn't it? God takes our desire to save ourselves and uses that desire to destroy our selfishness.

Let's read this passage again. Luke 9:23-24. *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. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."* Do you see the wisdom of God in the cross? It started with our self-centered desire to be saved. We want to get to heaven. God will use that very selfish desire to destroy our selfishness. How? When He says that it is only when we

lose our life for his sake that we will get it. And 'losing his life' in v. 24 is described in the preceding verse by the action of 'taking up his cross.'

V. 23: 'Let him take up his cross.'

V. 24: 'Let him lose his life.'

This point is crucial in understanding the cross. In God's plan, our desire to be saved will lead us to lose our life. Only then can we talk about eternal life. It is amazing how God works! Let's repeat it again. In the very desire to save myself, God destroys my selfishness by the cross.

From this, we understand that the power of God is not to be used by the Christian for his personal enjoyment. The selfish person that I was is transformed into a self-giving person by the cross. I now live for others. I now use the power of the cross for the benefit of others, and more specifically to communicate life to others. There is an interesting event in the OT which illustrates well this point. Let's read 2Kings 13:20-21.

2Kings 13:20-21. Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring.

21 Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

In order to understand this scene, we need to know something about the custom of burial in Israel at that time. People did not dig grave in the ground. Most people were buried in caves. Some caves had just one chamber. Others were more complex with several chambers. And in each chamber, there were shelves on which people put the body of the deceased. Here some men were carrying the body of another man into a cave. Suddenly they were surprised by a group of Moabites who wanted to rob them. Fearing for their security, they stopped everything and they dumped the body on the nearest shelf. That grave happened to be Elisha's grave. The text mentions that Elisha's bones were there. That means that the prophet had died a long time ago. As soon as the corpse touched Elisha's bones, the person came to life. That must have been quite a burial experience for these men!

The point of this peculiar incident is this. The power of God continues to work even through the dead Elisha to bring to life a person who had died. As we will see in this lesson, a servant of God is meant to be a channel of life. God's power is working through a disciple to bring life to others, to communicate life to others.

Two crosses

Now let's go back to our passage. Jesus said, *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.* This statement presupposes the existence of two crosses. One is Jesus' cross. The second one is our cross. Jesus is carrying His cross in the front. We are walking behind him with our cross. We 'take up our cross and follow him.' That is the picture of the sentence. But here is a question. If Jesus is carrying his cross, why do we have to carry another cross? 'Take up your cross every day,' Jesus said. Another way of asking the question is this: what is the difference between Jesus' cross and our cross? We always say that Jesus died for our sins. It is his cross that saves us. But if we are saved by the cross of Christ and only by his cross, why do we have to carry a cross? It seems that I have to die for myself again. How do we make sense of all that? And how does the cross of Christ relate to the cross of the disciple?

This last question is particularly interesting, and important also. What is the relationship between the cross of Christ and the cross of the believer? It is easy to understand that without the cross of Christ, we will never take up our cross. Because our heart will not be of the kind which will accept to take up the cross. The cross of Christ was for our redemption. But his death does not automatically

save the whole of mankind. In order to save us, the cross has to take effect in our lives. And it is only after the cross has taken effect in our lives that we will take up our cross. Not before.

The effect of the cross

What do we mean by ‘the cross of Jesus taking effect in my life’? We tend to think of the cross of Jesus as something legal that was accomplished, namely that through his death, my sins and my guilt have been removed. In Galatians, Paul speaks of the cross of Christ in a more personal way. Here is his understanding of what Jesus’ cross did in his life.

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.

Here Paul speaks about the direct effect of the cross of Christ upon his life. Put in a positive way, he is saying, ‘The cross of Christ has made God a reality to me and the world has become a cloud that is simply evaporating.’ Put in a negative way, Paul is saying, ‘If I am alive to the world, then the cross of Jesus has not taken effect in me. It has not accomplished its saving purpose in me, no matter how hard I believe that Jesus died for my sins.’ If you want to know whether the cross of Jesus has taken effect in your life, just ask yourself this question: Is God more real to you than the world, or is the world more real to you than God?

It is clear that if the cross of Christ has not taken effect in your life, you are not going to take up your cross and follow him. You have to let the cross of Christ come so close to you that it cuts you off from the world. Then you will carry your cross. It is not enough to believe that Jesus died for you. You can believe it with all your heart, you will still have no power. You will still have no joy. God will become a reality only when you allow the cross of Christ to cut your relationship to the world.

The cross, a sacrifice

Now think about the cross in terms of a sacrifice. Because the cross is indeed a sacrifice. This is how it is expressed in Hebrews 9:14: *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* The blood of Christ, the cross, is the offering of Jesus, without spot, to God. And this offering up of Jesus is specifically called a sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26: *He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.* Jesus has done away with sin through the sacrifice of himself. There we have it. For Jesus, the cross is a sacrifice.

For us, it is not different. The cross is also a sacrifice. Paul writes in 1Corinthians 15:31, *I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.* This was Paul’s response to those who did not believe in the resurrection. ‘If there is no resurrection,’ Paul argues, ‘what would be the point of risking my life daily for the sake of Christ? Why should ‘I die daily?’’ Does that ring a bell? ‘Take up your cross daily.’ Paul was an example of someone who took his cross daily for Christ. Every day he died for Christ. And he says in Romans 8:36, *As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’* This is the language of the OT sacrificial system. ‘We are like sheep to be slaughtered all day long, every day in the temple, as a sacrifice to God.’ So you see, the cross of the believer is a sacrifice.

We need to remember that a sacrifice is always offered for someone else, and never for itself. We just talked about the sheep that is being slaughtered. Is that sheep being offered for its own sake? No. It is dying for the sinner who is offering it. Jesus is the supreme sacrifice. He is the ‘Lamb of God’ (John 1:29). Did He die for himself? No. He died for us so that we may have life. This means that if we are a sacrifice, we are offering ourselves up to God for others. There is the answer to our initial

question. Why do we need to offer ourselves for others if Jesus did that already on the cross? The answer is this. When we receive the life of Christ, we are to pass it on to others.

We can put it in another way. Jesus is saying, 'I'm carrying the cross. You follow me. I died for your salvation. But that salvation is not something that you just keep for yourself. You received salvation through my death and resurrection. You will now pass on that salvation through your life and death for others.' This is the point of losing oneself. 'I died for your salvation. You die to pass on that salvation to others.' It is in losing your life that you will gain it. That is where salvation comes in. It is not until you lose your life for his sake and for others that you will gain it. This is the basic idea of Luke 9:24. *Whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*

To die and to save

Jesus died to save all men, but all mankind is not saved because this life is transmitted from one person to another. In God's plan, each believer becomes a channel to pass life to another. The calling of every Christian is to save others. This is expressed in the command to take up the cross. You will come to a deeper understanding of salvation when you actually take up your cross in the sense that you are willing to suffer, to live and to die for the salvation of others.

Of course, this does not mean that my life or my death has any atoning effect on people. As we just mentioned, we are simply a channel of salvation to others. We take up our cross so that through us, Jesus' saving power, Jesus' life may flow out to others. There is a passage in 2 Corinthians that expresses wonderfully this truth.

2 Corinthians 4:11-12. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

Do you see it?

- 'We are delivered every day to death for Jesus' sake.' We take up our cross daily.

- 'So that the life of Jesus may be manifested in us.' That is the power that we talked about at the beginning of the lesson, the power of the Christian life. We said that the power of Christianity is found in the cross.

- 'As a result, death is working in us, but life in you.' I give up my life to death for Jesus' sake. For what reason? So that the life of Jesus may be manifested in my body, so as to pass life to others. This power is used to communicate life. And it involves my death. I offer up my life to God as a sacrifice so that others may have eternal life.

I repeat again. Jesus' cross is for the redemption of mankind. Our cross does not have any redemptive property. If the taking up of my cross results in the salvation of some people, it is only because the life of Jesus was active in me in such a way that by my death, others received eternal life. Every conversion involves a sacrifice. Every Christian has benefited from the sacrifice of others. There are people who laid down their life, who gave up their time, their energy, everything, to build me up in eternal life. These people, you recognize them by their power. You will recognize in them the saving life of Jesus.

The Christian, a savior

In a sense, Jesus saved us in order to make us 'saviors.' Jude, in his letter, speaks about the duty of the believers to 'save' those who are on the road to destruction. Jude 23: *But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.* 'You are to step in their path and save them,' Jude says. 'Get them out of the flames of judgment before it is too late.' To whom was Jude giving this responsibility? To the Christians. Jude was addressing this exhortation to believers. Notice the opening sentence of Jude 1: *To those who have been called, who are loved by*

God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you are someone who is loved by God and preserved in Jesus. And you are also a savior of those who are perishing.

We normally reserve this title ‘savior’ for the Lord Jesus. But the Bible uses it also for other people. In 2Kings 13:5, we read that Israel was given a savior. *Therefore the Lord gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians; and the people of Israel dwelt in their homes as formerly.* God provided a savior for Israel to deliver them from the oppressive hand of their enemies.

A believer is also a savior. He has been entrusted the ministry to save others, to communicate life to others. The biblical way of communicating life is to pass it on from person to person. This is traditionally called discipleship. A disciple leads a person to Christ who, in his turn, becomes a ‘savior’ to another person.

This process requires power, a power that is found only in the cross. The cross means death and suffering. The process of communicating life involves death and suffering. As we mentioned before, it is only when you lose your life that you will gain it. And you do not gain it for your own enjoyment. You gain it in order to become a channel of Jesus’ life to others. This is what it means to take up our cross. We offer up ourselves to God so that being sacrificed and empowered by Him, we can give life to others.