

All In: Take Up Your Cross

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 1st, 2026. The temperature is starting to be in single digits again, which is good.

! My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the pastor here. Last week we started a new series called All In. And we kicked that off talking about the first of three directives that Jesus gives us in our main passage for this series, from Matthew 16, verse 24. Let's read this together. Would you read it with me?

Then Jesus said to his disciples, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

I was actually thinking for this week, maybe I'll do it next week, shorter series, but what I'd like to do is start blanking out chunks of this and see if you can remember them.

Because I don't know that we memorize scripture enough. Now, maybe you do. I know I don't. I remember our pastor at the church we attended before we came here.

[1 : 11] He had started to do that, started to show that he was memorizing scripture. So he would recite scripture and then he would get us to work on doing that as well.

And I think it's really important. So. Last week we considered what it means to deny yourself. Do you remember that? We talked about what it means to essentially look in the mirror and be honest about wanting God to search us, to reveal in us prideful or selfish motives so that we can learn to change.

And then we did a clenched fist exercise. Do you remember that if you were here? It reminded us, I hope, of the importance of letting go of the things in our lives that keep us from growing closer to God.

And then we recognize that once we let go of something, we need to not look back. We must move forward in our discipleship journey because God is leading us into the future.

So today we're going to continue by looking at the next directive that Jesus gives us in this passage. And we're going to see how challenging us to understand this and then even more challenging us to apply it in our lives.

[2 : 34] So Jesus gives us a certain picture here in this second directive. He says that we are to take up our or your cross. It's just a cross I have to bear.

You ever heard that phrase? Maybe you've said it yourself. Some nods, I'm seeing. So it's generally used by someone as an offhand comment often, right?

Like, good morning, how are you? Oh, I'm good, even if you're not. That's why some of you have heard me say to you, don't lie to me. Because if you're struggling, I want to know. So it's usually used as kind of a flippant comment.

And usually it's to suggest an inconvenience or an irritation of some kind, right? Something that may really be generally pretty minor.

Well, my car won't start. Eh, it's just a cross I have to bear, I guess. Can't afford a new one. But can you see how that phrase and its underlying meaning then are problematic?

[3 : 36] First, I believe that it suggests a flippant perspective on something that was not only a horrific method of capital punishment, but also the very specific means by which Jesus Christ himself died.

Oh, I didn't think you were going to make me feel that guilty, first thing. Pastor Kent. So second, I think it equates something that is likely an inconvenience or an irritation for us, which we heard, right?

With a level of sacrifice that is unequalled in human history. So I was thinking about it this week. I can honestly say that I have a bad memory sometimes, but I don't believe I've ever used that

phrase.

It's not that I'm somehow better than any of you or anyone else who may have used it, but it's not something that I can really bring myself to say. I once told a joke about Easter.

This is not a smart young man. I've been telling a joke about Easter. Probably in my preteens, maybe just a teenager, told my dad an Easter joke on Easter Sunday morning.

[4 : 46] It did not land well. Right? So sometimes we say things without remembering the context from which we're stealing that idea.

So I'm pretty confident that the majority of people who know the story of Jesus Christ, even casually, know that he literally took up a cross. One that had been identified and probably even constructed for him specifically.

And then he carried it to the place where he would be executed. The cross was a common and horrific Roman death instrument.

One that Jesus willingly died on to pay the penalty for our sins. So if you're looking for good news today, there it is.

So was Jesus being literal when he talked about his followers taking up their cross? Have you ever thought about that before? Did Jesus mean that we should go find some wood, do our best to make it into a cross, and then carry it around?

[5 : 56] No, of course not. Jesus used this statement metaphorically. But it is intended to illustrate some powerful truths. And we're going to unpack them together today.

So taking up our cross means that ultimately we can expect pain. This is not the sermon you were hoping for on Sunday morning, maybe.

So maybe some of you, most of you probably, know the story of the traumatic injury that I sustained to my right hand a few years ago. It was unexpected to say the least.

It was actually punctuated by a gasp. And it threw a huge wrench into my life. Not only did it cause pain and disability for a long, long time, but it resulted in years of rehab and hard work to get it back to where it is today.

Okay, sometimes still when I shake hands with Len, I give him a firm handshake or Larry, and they say, wow, you got some strength in that hand. So that's a lot of work and a lot of prayer.

[7 : 08] And it's not perfect, right? See the bend in it? That's just the way scar tissue is sometimes. So when that injury happened, both initially and then along the road to recovery, I didn't always know how to handle it.

There were days when I said to Michelle, and she will attest to this, that I felt like I wanted to wander into traffic. I was completely caught off guard by that situation.

Because before it happened, life was actually going pretty well. And then wham, right out of the blue. So this is why Jesus makes it clear time and time again in scripture that we may very likely experience pain if we decide to follow Jesus.

Now I'm not saying that was pain that I experienced because I followed Jesus, not at all. But that's the kind of surprise out of the blue pain that could come to us.

And our pain that we experience may not even be physical pain. But this life of a follower can truly be hard sometimes. And I think you can probably all agree and give experiences that you've had yourselves.

[8 : 21] So God wanted to make it clear, I like this about him, wanted it to make it clear to us, anyone that wanted to follow him, before we made our decision to follow.

Let's hear what Jesus says in John 16, 33. So you can look that up. John 16, verse 33. And you've heard it.

I have told you these things, Jesus says, though that in you, in me, you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble.

But take heart. I have overcome the world. That's amen worthy, by the way. I'm so glad that Jesus didn't stop at, in this world, you will have trouble.

So good luck. He didn't leave us in the middle of that trouble struggle. He didn't suggest that life would be hard and then we die.

[9 : 25] Right? He made it clear that we can have courage to see the course because he defeated death. The ultimate adversary, Jesus took care of that for us.

He's gone before us on this road and he's prepared a place for us where we will be with him again one day. It's also amen worthy.

Suffering in this world is temporary. Anybody take relief in that? We can overcome pain and challenges in this life through the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work within us. But it is made clear, no question, that there will be a cost to everyone who chooses to follow Christ and who chooses to sincerely commit their life to him.

Not an easy road. Jesus himself tells us before we take up our cross to follow him, there will be a cost. Jesus makes it clear.

[10:37] And we must consider what that cost would be. So what was the cost of following Jesus for his first 12 disciples? It cost many of them, literally, cost them their lives.

And whether we stop to recognize this or not, loss of life is still a very present reality for many of Jesus' followers around the world. Right?

We are, I hate to use the word lucky, we are blessed to be gathering here this morning without real fear, any real fear, I would suggest, that someone will burst into our church doors with a gun, with a threat against us for talking, using the name of Christ.

But for many of our brothers and sisters around the world, their lives are literally in danger. So as we noted a little bit earlier, our personal pain in following Jesus may not even be physical pain at all. Maybe the pain that we'll face for being a follower of Jesus is at times more mental, or emotional even. So what else can we expect on our happy list this morning of things that we can expect if we choose to follow Jesus?

[11:57] Many times when we read about Jesus, we learn about large crowds following him everywhere he would go. And if he wasn't in the presence of a crowd, Jesus' 12 disciples spent a lot of time with him, right?

Poor Jesus. I think they drove him crazy sometimes. So really, recognizing his ministry and his followers, we can imagine, how could Jesus have been lonely?

He was surrounded by people all the time. But I think we would be wrong in that assumption. Because as Jesus was nearing the end of his life here on earth, when it mattered most, when he was about to be crucified, the Bible tells us in John 19, verse 17, you can flip to that if you like, just a few verses if you kept your finger in John.

John 19, verse 17 says, carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

So now, maybe when I talked about Jesus carrying his cross to where he would be crucified, those of you who know the story well would have said, oh, wait a minute, he didn't. So I should have said, we'll get there, because here we are.

[13:18] Scholars suggest that Jesus carried his cross alone for as much as half a mile. And then Simon of Cyrene, maybe you know this, he was forced by the Romans to help him due to Jesus' injuries.

He just could not carry it any longer. So what a moment this would have been, though. Already in pain from being beaten and flogged at the hands of the Romans, Jesus now had to make this final journey to the place of his execution, carrying his own cross down the road.

Maybe you've heard the song *Via Dolorosa* before. Do you know it? It means road or way of suffering.

And it is the very Roman road that Jesus willingly chose to walk. He humbled himself to walk that road.

Taking up our cross as Jesus models for us will sometimes result in loneliness, sometimes feeling like we're isolated. This really is what it means to live in the world, but not of the world.

[14:37] As scripture suggests, this is the life that followers of Jesus are called to. Have you ever felt like you were alone at times in your life?

Even surrounded by people? Even in relationships? I definitely have. And yet it was always a comfort to me during those times that I was never truly alone.

The Holy Spirit was always with me. He was always there to talk to, to comfort me, to lead me forward through difficult times.

So even when Jesus was taking this lonely road towards his death, his father was always with him. Jesus knew what waited for him beyond this earthly death.

his resurrection and the fulfillment of God's mission for him. Jesus, you see, knew he would be returning to the father's side.

[15 : 44] No matter how short it was, though, for that time leading up to his death, Jesus felt alone. He felt abandoned by his family and even some of his closest friends.

I think all of his closest friends. So maybe you're feeling this in your own life and circumstances right now. Maybe people you were close to have turned their back on you because of your beliefs.

Friends or even family have walked away from you because of what you believe. I hope that's not your story. But Jesus talks about this in Luke 12, verses 49 to 53.

So if you want to flip to Luke 12, 49 to 53, and I'll read it for us. I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled.

But I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I am, I am under until it is completed. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?

[16 : 54] No, I tell you, but division. From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two, and two against three.

They will be divided father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

If we truly want to follow Jesus and give our lives over to his will for us, we need to have come to terms with the fact in our lives that people we love may walk away.

Even in anger sometimes. Because we're following Jesus. I have a good friend who is very, very committed to her faith.

Her daughter was going through some identity struggles and my friend came to the decision that she could not follow a faith that would separate her from her daughter for eternity.

[18 : 05] My friend who is very committed to her faith is now very committed to helping other people who follow Jesus find their way away from him.

Maybe you come from a home that also worships God. That's my story. Maybe you don't. I know that's true for some of you that you were a trailblazer.

But no matter what your story is, Jesus calls us to face whatever season and circumstances come our way, even if it is a season of loneliness.

No matter how difficult things can get, I believe that we can all agree, I hope we can, that in the end, it will all be worth it.

Here's your happy ending. You may have heard it said that Jesus is our brother, right? We sang about it this morning.

[19 : 13] Jesus is our brother. And this is something that the Bible makes it clear for us time and time again. And the family of God is beautiful. It's a beautiful picture.

And I think so often when I'm here with all of you and we're worshipping the Lord together, I get a picture of heaven. I've shared that with you before that every so often there's a moment of real glory that comes through.

So the family of God is beautiful. And as we know, as families here on earth, it's a beautiful thing when we partner together for good deeds, right?

I have two older brothers. I was trying to think of a sermon illustration I could give you where we partner together. Nah. My dad's funeral, I think, now that I think about it right now.

We did partner together there. And not that we're not close, we are close. I couldn't think of any other examples except for my brother throwing an apple at my head when I was young.

[20 : 15] It split into three equal parts which we both thought was fascinating. But Paul writes in Romans about this concept of partnership.

And this is really where I want us to land today when it comes to going all in for Jesus and taking up our cross. Romans 8 verse 17 says, Now if we are children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may share in his glory.

Also share in his glory. Paul makes it clear there that if we want to share in Jesus' glory, we must also and maybe even first share in his suffering.

That's what Jesus taught his disciples all along. And for you and me as contemporary disciples of Christ, I think that's his message for us today as well.

[21 : 24] The road won't always be easy. But we do have a heavenly guarantee that it will be worth it in the end. Partnership with Christ means recognizing what he has done and then recognizing what he has called us to do and then doing it.

It means following him, learning from him, being a student, being a disciple. It means that we'll give up on our way of life and embrace his way of life.

We willingly take up our own cross as we follow Jesus. So what's maybe standing in your way of doing this today?

What's holding you back from going all in? From taking up your own cross? Maybe you've grown up learning tons about the Bible and about Jesus.

I think that's the case for most of us. Maybe it's only been the fun and enjoyable things about him that you focused on.

[22 : 44] Maybe you didn't hear much about the potential for suffering and pain, right? Like we've heard this morning. Maybe you've come to learn about that experience through your own life and the challenges that you're facing.

There are moments of suffering that simply cannot be avoided. Grief is a big one. And really, no one escapes from the trouble of life, even Jesus.

But even though that cost can be very, very real, so is the reward. We must embrace the cross, embrace our cross, as we follow Christ through life and into eternity.

It isn't always easy, but it's so worth it in the end. Amen.