

# The Church's Cost

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Then he, that's Jesus, strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Despite all of this remarkable revelation, the messianic secret of Jesus' identity continues in his public ministry, even while the Jews are demanding a sign.

Now in today's passage, I think we start to see something of why Jesus didn't want the disciples announcing he was the Christ. And the reason is simple. They didn't really know what it meant to say that Jesus was the Christ.

They had not witnessed his crucifixion at Golgotha, his resurrection from the dead, or his ascension to the Father in glory. They had some ideas in their heads, shaped both by scripture and their culture, much as we today have ideas about Jesus, shaped both by scripture and the waters we swim in.

But the deliverance which the Christ is bringing to his people will subvert all their expectations. And it will be more complete than the delivery, or than the defeat of any oppressive military power like Rome ever could be, or any corrupt local rulers like Herod ever could be.

The disciples having received from the Father the revelation that Jesus is the Christ now need to learn more about what that means. So verse 21, where our passage for today begins, from that time, which is to say, from the time of this remarkable revelation that Jesus is the Christ.

[ 1 : 2 9 ] From that time, Jesus begins to teach his disciples he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day be raised. Such a shameful turn of events was absolutely inconceivable to the disciples, and I think understandably so.

So just as Jesus begins to teach, Peter begins to rebuke his master. He simply cannot accept that this is the path of the Christ's deliverance. Verse 22, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you.

And the audacity of such a reaction to speak out and directly contradict the one you have just learned is the Christ, God's anointed. I think it underlines Peter's shock at Jesus' teaching, but I think it also demonstrates that we as contemporary listeners have lost something of the absolute scandal of the crucifixion.

It's the horror of the reality that God himself was reduced to mangled flesh and pinned upon a cross. And we know the whole story from start to finish, so it's harder to empathize with Peter, and it's easy to embrace the cross of Christ.

Or is it? Do we actually embrace the cross? Now, if Peter's language is shocking, the language of Jesus' response is equally shocking.

[ 3 : 0 5 ] And it reveals there are deep currents working below the surface of the action. We are, in fact, getting an echo of the third temptation in the wilderness when Jesus faced his great adversary.

When Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and promised, all these things I will give to you. These are precisely the things of man that Peter is setting his mind upon.

He wants glory, honor, and power for the one who will deliver him. And in this very moment, Peter becomes a temptation or a snare for Jesus in an attempt to hinder him from his God-given mission, that's the Christ.

Which is quite striking because just six verses earlier, Peter confessed a remarkable revelation. And there he is, the very same man, functioning as a conduit for evil.

Because, as Jesus tells him, he is setting his mind on the things of man. But even more than striking, I think this behavior from Peter is tremendously humbling for those of us who would confess that Jesus is the Christ.

[ 4 : 1 4 ] because in Peter, we have a mirror of our own sinful, selfish desires and actions, the things of man. We want glory, we want honor, we want power, and we want it without the cross.

I think a good test to feel out whether or not this is the case is to ask ourselves, in what way do our lives imitate the one we claim to worship.

And this is the crucial link between the first half and the second half of the passage, when Jesus speaks about his crucifixion, and then the second half, where he speaks about his disciples taking up their cross and denying themselves for his sake.

That is to say, our justification and our sanctification are inextricably linked, and they are inextricably shaped by the cross. Our German brother, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, memorably puts it this way in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering, which every man must experience, is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.

[ 5 : 30 ] It is that dying of the old man, which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death.

We give over our lives to death, and thus it begins. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. Now what is so startling about what Jesus teaches his disciples here is that in suffering, death, and resurrection, they will see the very nature of God on display.

And it is not the God they want. In point of fact, due to sin, it is positively unnatural to want to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and imitate such a God.

Why on earth should we choose suffering, disgrace, and mortification? To what purpose? And Jesus gives his disciples three reasons here in this passage.

[ 6 : 46 ] Now he hinted at his resurrection victory already in verse 21 by promising he would be raised. He doesn't really say more about what that means. But now it gets drawn into the foreground and it's expanded in three ways.

So the first reason we should desire to take up our cross and follow Jesus is because it is the path to true life. Verse 25, For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

The person that thinks they are truly living life by pursuing their own happiness, Jesus says, is deceived. Life is found only in the one who is true life, who came so that we might have life and have it to the full.

With this reason, Jesus confronts our aspirations for autonomy. We cannot deliver ourselves. We are not wise. We are not strong enough.

The second reason we should desire to take up our cross and follow Christ is related but distinct. Verse 26, For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

[ 8 : 00 ] Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? Because the world cannot offer us true life, if we set our minds on gaining these very things, we forfeit our souls.

And that draws us back to the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. forgiveness. It reminds us that he, Satan, the great accuser, is the ruler of this world with all of its dehumanizing systems leading us away from true life.

If we commit ourselves to this world, we are declaring our allegiance to him rather than to the kingdom of God. And we must suffer those consequences.

with this second reason, Jesus challenges our assumption that the universe is a neutral space rather than the very fabric of a cosmic battle between good and evil.

But the third and the final reason Jesus gives explains and completes the other two. We should desire to take up our cross and follow the Christ because he has taken his glorious throne as Lord of the universe.

[ 9 : 17 ] And when he returns, each of us will have to give an account for whom we have chosen to follow. Verse 27. For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Which is to say, though we can taste some of the fruits of our labor today, our true and our ultimate joy or our final and cataclysmic demise will depend on this day of judgment when Christ will repay each of us according to what we have done with his invitation to come to him.

Now, all right, you might say, that's a rather grim piece of theologizing. Does this mean the life of the Christian is one of endless misery? Living in the decadent West, should I be browbeaten for every time I experience pleasure and should I feel guilty about it?

But the Christian walk does not follow in the steps of the ascetic or the stoic or the masochist because our suffering is or it ought to be suffering for the sake of Christ as we follow in his footsteps.

If we do suffer and it's likely we all will, it must be for his glory as we obediently undertake his mission to go and make disciples.

[ 10 : 49 ] When we take up our cross, we are not giving up good things for something better. We are letting go of that which is passing away for something glorious.

The Christian, in the end, is not defined by what they deny. Christians are defined by who they embrace. Jesus, the Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, the one who can sympathize with us in our weakness, who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, humbling himself to death, even death upon the cross.

So as we come to the table this morning, may we remember this. May we draw strength from it and equipped and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, may we take up our cross and follow Christ wherever he might lead us for his sake.

To God be the glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.