

Bearing the Mark of Following Jesus

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, KJV).

If you were asked, “Do you know the Lord?” most who are reading this article would answer, “Yes, I know Him. He is my Savior and Lord.” What a wonderful thing it is to know the Lord, to have our sins washed away and have assurance of eternal life.

Would you also be able to claim you are a disciple of Jesus?

Being a disciple of Jesus is so much more than “knowing the Lord.” Jesus’ statement in Luke 9:23 explains that to be His disciple, one must be willing to bear a cross for Him. Bearing a cross is definitely not the same as *wearing* a cross, although in our post-Christian era, wearing a cross around one’s neck is becoming more and more like bearing a cross. To those who reject the Jesus of the cross, the wearing of a cross has become an offense and a reason to discriminate against or persecute the wearer.

The cross of a disciple is to be a replica of Jesus’ cross in that it is an instrument of death. The world, past and present, is full of followers of Jesus who have paid the ultimate price for being His disciple. Their love for Him compelled them to give their all in service to Him. They bore their cross proudly and gladly.

But when Jesus said that to be His disciple, one had to take up his cross daily and follow Him, it is obvious He was not speaking of giving one’s life in martyrdom, for you can only do that one time. Nevertheless, the cross is a symbol of death; it has no other purpose. Death, therefore, must be a

reality in the life of a disciple.

Someone once said that it is easier to die for Christ than to live for Him. That person was not talking about the normal, everyday Christian life we are familiar with. Rather, he was talking about the life of a true disciple. One who has surrendered his life to the Master's call. One who has put to death the normal ambitions of the flesh in exchange for a life of spiritual servitude.

A New Testament definition of *disciple* is "imitator." In Jesus' day disciples of a rabbi did not just attend an hour or so of teaching on the Sabbath, or even every day. The disciple lived with the teacher and studied his every move. He was merely a shadow of the teacher. The result was that he became like his teacher. The 12 disciples of Jesus are an observable example of this type of discipleship.

As imitators of Jesus, we are to be like Him and do what He did. Jesus lived simply, loved everybody, suffered rejection by His own people, accepted willingly the weight of the sins of every person, and finally, died the cruelest death of all as He paid our debt of sin. With that in mind, could we have the audacity to call ourselves a disciple? Do we have the courage to accept that role? Or the will?

The cross of a disciple may be heavy; however, it is not one we carry alone, for we are yoked with the One who is able to support the main load. He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Being a follower of Jesus, walking in close proximity to Him, puts us in a position to learn from Him. Eugene Peterson renders these verses, "Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or unfitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll

learn to live freely and lightly” (MSG).

To be Jesus’ disciple, we must bear a cross, but the cross is not meant to break us or wear us down. Rather, it is a badge of honor, identifying us with our beloved Master, who not only carried His cross, but also gave His life on it for our sakes.

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