



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 10:24-42

Topic

Your love for Jesus overcomes the fear you might have of losing your life by sharing Him with people who want the truth of the Gospel to remain hidden

Title

*"I'm So Excited, I Just Can't Hide Him,
I'm About to Lose My Life and I think I Like It"*

Introduction

Are you a Christian? Or a Christ-follower?

It's a distinction that is being made more and more today, and often the latter term, Christ-follower, is replacing the former term, Christian.

1 of 14

Matthew 10:24-42

*"I'm So Excited, I Just Can't Hide Him,
I'm About to Lose My Life and I Think I Like It"*

Before you pick a preference I should explain that Christ-followers consider themselves edgy and hip and think of Christians as shallow church-goers who wear suits and ties, have Christian bumper stickers on their cars, and prefer the King James Version.

I say we go even further as hipsters and adopt an entirely new term: Cross-takers.

It's from this statement by Jesus: "And he who does not **take** his **cross** and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38).

Before He tells you to "**follow** after Me," Jesus says "**take** [your] **cross**."

Even though Jesus' statement about the cross doesn't occur until near the end of our text, I think it controls everything else He said. It's that powerful.

It was the first time in the Gospel of Matthew that He mentioned the cross to His followers. In their culture, at that time, it would have been an astonishing statement. The cross was Rome's instrument of capital punishment for the worst criminals. If you were convicted, you would be forced to "take" your cross. The beam would be strapped across your shoulders and you would be made to carry it to the place of crucifixion outside the city where it would be affixed to the upright post - after your wrists were nailed to the beam. A third nail would be driven through your ankles into the post.

The next time someone refers to them self as a Christ-follower, one-up them and tell them you are a Cross-taker.

That is, **if you are a Cross-taker**. You see, there is a choice, and in this passage we see both the risks and the stakes involved.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Take Your Cross Knowing The Risks Involved, and #2 You Take Your Cross Knowing The Stakes Involved.

#1 You Take Your Cross Knowing The Risks Involved

(v24-39)

Our verses define discipleship from the time Jesus was on the earth until He returns in His Second Coming.

Kermit the Frog is famous for saying, "it's not easy being green." Well, it's not easy being a disciple, either. There are risks involved. Family may disown me; men may persecute me; I might even suffer martyrdom.

Jesus spells out the risks.

Mat 10:24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

Mat 10:25 It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!

"Beelzebub" was a local Canaanite deity. Don't ask me why but the Jews adopted the name as a way of identifying Satan.

The opponents of Jesus accused Him of being in league with the devil. His point here was that as His disciple you can expect to be treated just like He was.

I was called the devil once; sadly, it was by a fellow believer. A couple once tried to hold a prayer meeting to cast a demon out of my wife.

At the time those things were very troubling but, in light of what Jesus said, I'm feeling pretty good about them.

Mat 10:26 Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

The sense of this is that the opponents of the Gospel try to cover and hide the truth by their accusations and attacks, but God will see to it that His truth will be revealed and made known.

In every generation there is an effort to defeat the Gospel by antagonizing believers. God's Word marches on victorious through the centuries.

Mat 10:27 "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

In the dark, in your ear, is a way of describing the private teaching of Jesus to His disciples before He sends them out. For us it would include our devotions, our Bible study, the verses that the Holy Spirit brings to our memory; in short, it is everything we are taught by God as His followers.

By their accusations men seek to make you afraid to share God's Word that He has given to you. Instead share it "in the light," i.e., openly. If you get an opportunity, "preach" it from "the housetops," which in those days served as a sort of patio.

In other words, use everything you can as a pulpit to share and spread God's Word. Be on the lookout for ways to witness.

Mat 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Did He just say "kill?" Yes; yes He did. This disciple stuff just got a lot more serious.

Two truths:

1. Hell is a real place.
2. There will be people there with both body and soul being *destroyed* - a word which describes an ongoing punishment rather than an annihilation.

The worst they can do to a disciple is kill you. Sad when you are warning them of Hell, not willing they should go there to be punished for eternity, and they respond with violence against you.

Mat 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

Mat 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Mat 10:31 Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Sixteen "copper coins" were worth one penny. Think of the change jangling in your pockets back then!

Your hairs aren't just counted; each one has its own number.

Whether it's a sparrow or one hair from your head, what happens is within the will of God.

God is sovereign and He directs His creation providentially. He has, within His sovereignty, given mankind free will. That being the case, there is, to me, anyway, a big difference between saying something *is* God's will versus saying it is *within* God's will.

Take the devastating typhoon in the Philippines. Last count I heard was around 4000 dead. Was that God's will in the sense that He personally determined to send the typhoon? Or was it within the will of God who, graciously, has allowed mankind a measure of free will that has plunged all of creation into a state of sin that He is going to one day totally redeem?

God created the whole universe and the laws of nature (Genesis 1:1). Most natural disasters are a result of these laws at work. Hurricanes, typhoons, and tornados are the results of divergent weather patterns colliding. Earthquakes are the result of the earth's plate structure shifting. A tsunami is caused by an underwater earthquake.

The Bible proclaims that Jesus Christ holds all of nature together (Colossians 1:16-17). Could God prevent natural disasters? Absolutely! Does God sometimes influence the weather? Yes. God sometimes causes natural disasters as a judgment against sin. The book of Revelation describes many events which could definitely be described as natural disasters.

Is every natural disaster a punishment from God? Absolutely not.

In much the same way that God allows evil people to commit evil acts, God allows the earth to reflect the consequences sin has had on creation. Romans 8:19-21 tells us, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

Back to our text. God cares for His followers more than He does sparrows, but believers do fall in the sense that you might be killed for your faith. One commentator put it this way: "God will not waste the life of one of His soldiers."

In a battle, in a war, soldiers fall. I've been using the example of D-Day in World War II. The Allied commanders knew there would be massive casualties before, during, and after the landing; but the strategy in total worked to end the war. It was their hope no soldier's life would be wasted for the greater good.

"You are of more value" means you can trust that, should a believer fall in death, it is to a great good God is doing. Most likely you will not know the extent of the good. In fact, it won't make much sense to you at all. It is then you want to look at a sparrow and remember God's intimate knowledge of every life.

Mat 10:32 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

Mat 10:33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Keep this in the context of being persecuted for your faith. Think of the martyrs being given the opportunity to save their lives by denying Jesus and refusing to do so.

Does this additionally mean that if we are not 'good' enough that Jesus will, in the end, deny us entrance into Heaven? As to our day-to-day failures, one commentator wrote,

The Lord will not confess the confessing Judas, nor deny the denying Peter; the traitor who denied Him [by his acts] is denied... We confess Christ by every genuine and earnest testimony for Him; we deny Him by every unChristian deed.

We take the approach that this is more about your future rewards than your eternal salvation. Nevertheless you most certainly don't want to be among those who are in any way denying Christ.

Mat 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

Mat 10:35 For I have come to 'SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW';

Mat 10:36 and 'A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD.'

Jesus came to make peace between God and man by solving the problem of our separation from God as sinners. Far too often when individuals trust Jesus for their salvation, and confess Him to family, instead of peace there is conflict.

Mat 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Would you say your love for Jesus Christ is greater, deeper, more intense, than your love for your husband or your wife or your children or your extended family?

One of the possible meanings of "worthy" is *due reward*. If you love anyone or anything more than Jesus, and live accordingly, you are not due any reward from Him.

If it seems harsh, know this: Only by loving Jesus with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength can you truly love and serve your husband, your wife, your children, etc., etc. Any other love is selfish and it sets up the other person as an idol in your life.

Mat 10:38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

Let's get a little deeper into what the disciples would have thought when Jesus used the cross as His illustration.

Crucifixion was a most disgraceful form of execution. It was usually reserved for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries, and vile criminals.

Flogging, or scourging, was done before every crucifixion. The scourging was intended to bring a victim to a state just short of death. Also, it hurt. A lot.

The whip had iron balls tied a few inches from the end of each leather thong on the whip. Sharp bones would be tied near the ends. The iron balls would cause deep bruising, while the leather thongs would cut into the skin. After a few lashes the muscles would begin to be cut. Blood loss was considerable, and the pain would have put the victim in a state of shock.

After the scourging, the victim would carry his own cross bar (called a *patibulum*) from the scourging post inside the city to the crucifixion area outside of the city walls. It weighed anywhere from 75 to 125 pounds. The cross bar would be balanced on the victim's shoulders, and their arms would be tied to the crossbar. In this position, if the victim tripped or fell, they could not use their arms to break their fall, and they would likely fall face first into the ground.

The upright part of the cross (the stipe) was permanently mounted in the crucifixion area. Once it was reached, the victim would be nailed to the cross bar. The nails would be driven through the wrists, not through the palms, as these would not support the body weight.

The cross bar would then be raised and placed on the upright post, where the victim's heels would be nailed to the post.

Oh, and just to add insult, the victim was crucified naked.

Once crucified, a victim would live for a period ranging from a few hours to a few days. How long he lived depended mostly on how severe the scourging was.

If no one claimed the body, it would be left on the cross to be eaten by predatory animals. The family could, however, claim the body for burial. In this case, a Roman soldier would pierce the chest with a sword or spear to make sure the victim was dead.

We're blessed to have a lot of military personnel; a lot of law enforcement officers; and a lot of fire fighters. All of you put your life on the line everyday, and we think you "worthy," i.e., due reward from us, even if it's only our high praise.

It therefore should not surprise us that we are, as believers, asked to put our lives on the line everyday for Jesus and for the Gospel.

Soldiers protect our way of life. Law enforcement and fire services protect our lives. **Cross-takers protect the Gospel that saves men and women for eternity from the fires of Hell.**

Of course it's worthy of risking our lives.

You are "worthy," due reward, to the extent you take your cross. There seem to be a choice involved. It's not the choice of whether or not you will confess or deny Jesus Christ at the point of martyrdom; very few of us will ever face that moment.

No, as one author said, "It's easier to die for Christ as a martyr than to live for Him day-to-day."

It's a choice in terms of how you live and whether Jesus is truly priority one with you.

Mat 10:39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Your spiritual life should take priority over, and should drive, your physical life. Spiritual life is real life; you're only really living when the physical is subordinate to the spiritual.

It is in the day-to-day that Jesus invites you to take your cross; to live as if your life was forfeited to Him and you and your resources were all available to Him to be used to confess Him before men.

It's up to each of us to determine where we have, and where we have not, taken our cross.

#2 You Take Your Cross Knowing The Stakes Involved

(v40-42)

These closing verses are interesting in that, although they continue to be about you as a disciple, they introduce a receptive audience. Some people will believe the testimony about Jesus and be saved.

Mat 10:40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

The meaning of "receives" is more than just taking you in and offering hospitality. It means receiving the message - the Gospel.

It means recognizing that you have sinned, turning away from your sins, and trusting in and receiving Jesus Christ into your life as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus was "sent" by the Father to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the human race. It is a message for all human beings that becomes effective in saving them when it is received by repentance and faith.

Mat 10:41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Mat 10:42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

A prophet's reward or a righteous man's reward is not eternal salvation. We do not earn Heaven by anything we do for God or for any of God's messengers. We rather share in the blessings they receive through the Word of God: peace with God, patience in time of tribulation, confidence to pray, and the like.

We receive eternal salvation through faith in Christ alone, but here Jesus speaks of the blessings with which God graciously rewards our fruits of faith, our good works.

Listening to this, the disciples would be encouraged that there would be those individuals who would receive The Lord and it would be evidenced by their good works that follow, and are the fruit, of salvation.

In other words, men and women would be saved for eternity, rewarded in this life with grace sufficient to their walk, and in Heaven by Jesus as His good and faithful servants.

There is Heaven to gain and Hell to avoid, and that's why I'm saying that the stakes are high.

There can be nothing more vital than to determine your eternal destiny. Yet, for the most part, men go about ignoring it, or deceived by some religious notion they grew up with or embraced that tells them it will all, somehow, work out in the end.

Enter the Gospel: You are a helpless sinner, an enemy of God, condemned from the womb for Hell. Jesus, as God and man, has taken your place by dying on the cross to satisfy the holiness of God against sin, and He offers you, in an exchange for your sin, His righteousness by which God can justify you and accept you into Heaven.

It's a message entrusted in each generation one-by-one to those who hear it, believe it, and receive The Lord.

It's then up to them - up to us - to share it with others. To do so effectively we must be cross-takers who love Jesus above and beyond all else - even our very lives.

It's a spiritual battle for men's eternal souls and there are risks involved. But the stakes are too high to hold back; and the rewards are too great to pass on them - both in this life and in the next.

One additional thought. We've been thinking about taking the cross as if we must be willing, ultimately, to die for Jesus.

We must also understand that taking the cross means we have *already* died to sin and to self. We've died, and been buried, with Jesus.

And we've been raised from the dead with Him, too.

Spiritually speaking, we have resurrection life as God the Holy Spirit both indwells and empowers us to live for Jesus.

We walk, or at least we can choose to walk, in this newness of life, dead to self and alive to God, making a difference in the destiny of those who are perishing.