

See God's Grace in the Cross. His and Ours.

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:31-38 NIV11).

There comes a point in many a Christian's life when they are ready to go home. I don't mean home to an earthly address, but ready to go be with Jesus. They are sick or just plain tired and well along in years and they are ready for Jesus to come and take them home. But it happens on occasion that family members are not. This is not surprising. On one hand, death is not natural. It's a horrible consequence of sin. We can't stand being separated from those we love. We are right to grieve. On the other hand, it pokes a bit at our consumer humanistic mentality as though everything in this life is supposed to have a fairy tale ending, get better, make perfect sense to us, and we can control it for our advantage. But we can't. Peter couldn't. But Jesus helped Peter and he helps us to **See God's Grace in the Cross. His and Ours.**

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...” It couldn't be avoided now because Jesus spoke so plainly. Jesus was not going to Jerusalem to be crowned king by the Jewish leaders or Herod. Jesus was going to *“suffer many things”* at the hands of the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, get a death sentence from Rome, and be crucified and rise after three days. Peter shuddered at the horror of the thought that the Messiah would suffer anything. Peter had just confessed Jesus as the *“Messiah, the Son of God.”* This is God in the flesh, but he was going to suffer and die?!? Peter didn't want the cross. All he could see there was darkness, a sad ending to their three-year friendship, and personal loss to himself. Peter rebuked Jesus.

You ever try talking God out of his good plans for us? Peter did. He thought it best to talk some sense into Jesus since Jesus' plan didn't align with his triumphal glorious plan. Peter was thinking like a consumer. It happens to all of us. We start to feel that the goal of life is happiness, or making this life better for me or for my kids, or the absence of hurt or pain or sadness. While those are all wonderful things, and we may rightly pray for them, and it's good to be happy, they can't be the goal and purpose of the Christian's life. The goal of the Christian life is God, his love for us, and our purpose is God's will for us. Those of us who have tried to make happiness our goal often find ourselves with a dependance on a substance or self-destructive behavior, relationships that are straining under the weight and pressure we are putting on them in our attempt to find happiness and fulfillment in them because they were never meant to bear that load, overloaded schedules that include so many things for me or for the kids or whatever that we find less and less joy in them. Peter saw the Messiah as the ticket to a better life, a more glorious one with less problems for him and his friends. But Jesus was heading to a cross. Peter didn't want the cross. And let's be honest, we don't either.

“Get behind me Satan!” Jesus rebuked Peter; he would be right in saying these words to us as well. He said them to Satan himself after being tempted by the devil. The devil offered him power, offered him security, offered him life's pleasures and relief, but Jesus refused because that was not the goal of his life, nor was it in line with God's will for him. Why do we get sucked into thinking what Satan offers us should be our goal in life? It's because it seems like it's possible for this world to offer us these things, and for us to attain them with the right effort or a little help from above (“if God really exists or loves me”). It appears others have them, why don't I? Just a little more stuff, a little more currency, a little more time, a few more experiences, a little more security, but all that this world has is never enough because the world can't give us these things – Adam and Eve learned that when they reached out their hand and took the fruit of the tree of which God said, “No.” It seems we are no better than Peter. And so Jesus rebuked Peter, and us too.

Jesus went to the cross because his goal is God, and the cross was God's will for Jesus. God would set things right. God would fulfill his promises to two sinners in a garden, and a world filled with people who deserve his judgment and wrath for our sinfulness. That's where God would show his justice in punishing sin and sinners to the full extent.

That's where God would show his mercy in forgiving a world full of sinners. But it cost the sinless Son of God his life. Jesus bore our shame. He suffered for all the times we looked for our goals or fulfillment in life in anything or anyone but our Father in heaven. He suffered rejection for all the times we rejected God's will and commands for us and sinned. He endured scorn and derision, malicious lies, and countless blasphemies. The Father turned his face away from him for all the times we thought, said, and did shameful things. And Jesus died for us. And he rose again as he said, so that you can see. See God's Grace in the Cross. It's where your forgiveness was won. It's your assurance that God is at peace with you. It is where the chains of sin, shame and guilt that bound you were broken for good. **See God's Grace in the Cross – His....and Ours.**

It happens more than we'd like to admit. We worship the gift rather than the giver, the blessings more than the one who blesses us. It happens with little kids when they open a present and don't immediately thank the giver or revel in the simple fact that they are loved, but instead take it for granted and focus only on the gift. Parents have to train their children to say, "Thank You," and even argue with them at the kitchen table to scribble out a few words of thanks to send in the mail. When we get older it's not as cute though we don't always catch ourselves like our parents did. We worship the gift rather than the giver. Peter wanted the good times, the power, the feeling to continue, but Jesus headed for that cross. Peter tried to stop the cross, and certainly denied the cross when first it came his way. He deserted Jesus when he was faced with sheathing his sword and being chained with Jesus. His world crumbled. His faith faltered. He denied Jesus to save his own skin, to protect his own pride. He despaired of himself. The crosses kept coming.

What is our cross? *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* Our cross is not our suffering for sin and guilt, because Jesus' cross did that. Our cross is not just any difficulty common to man for even unbelievers suffer. The cross is difficulty that comes because you are a Christian, your goal is God, his love, and his will for you is your purpose. It might look like this: "Follow Jesus, God's will, God's Word and....suffer, miss out, be made fun of, lose out on, be placed at a disadvantage, despair, feel friendless and judged, struggle in our soul and conscience, and maybe even be put on a cross." *Denying yourself* is no fun. But is there any other choice? Jesus said, *"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"* It is not worth comparing – the world and all its empty offers of pleasure, security and power or knowing Jesus your Savior and his love and the eternity in heaven that he will give you. Paul said, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Why all the crosses? These crosses are by God's design for you to carry as you follow your Savior, each one of you. They are crosses that will keep you close to him, crosses that will refine and mature you, crosses that will dig deep and cut out the infection of sinful idolatries hidden deep in our hearts. They are crosses that God gives you because you are important to him. He will put up with many things, but never second place in your heart. Some crosses we don't understand why he has given them, but we know he loves us. His works good for us and for others.

Jesus bore his cross willingly. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Winning you, taking up his glory again and ruling on the throne in heaven – all through a cross. James encourages us to consider it "pure joy when we face trials" because they produce perseverance and maturity in us (James 1:2ff). Peter tells us to even rejoice when we suffer because we are Christians for not only does it show us that we are Christians, but it will make it all the sweeter when Jesus is revealed in his glory. Don't be surprised that you suffer, Peter says (1 Peter 4:12).

Wait, what? Peter said that? Yes. After Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to Peter, forgave Peter and called him to follow him, Peter started to understand. On Pentecost the crucified and risen Christ was all Peter could talk about. The crosses we bear for Christ is what Peter addressed in his letters, 1st and 2nd Peter.

Peter didn't want the cross. We don't want the cross. But Jesus loves us enough to give them to us. We follow after him unashamed of his cross and ours, filled with peace, even joy in this time before he takes us home and changes our address to a heavenly one. We know where we are going. We know who leads us. We know our goal and purpose – it's Him, his love, and his will for us. **We See his Grace in the Cross – His and ours.** Amen.