

ARE YOU CARRYING?

In Jesus' day, a condemned man carried the crossbeam that he would be nailed to and then lifted up on an upright pole to die an excruciating death. Sound like something you would do?

In Luke 9 Jesus declared to everyone around Him, "*If anyone would come after Me, let Him deny Himself and take up His cross daily and follow Me.*" We discount this by defining cross in ways that don't make us deny ourselves. But Jesus keeps explaining what "cross" really means.

DO YOU LOSE OR GAIN? In verse 24 Jesus said, "*for whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*" Those who trivialize the cross and twist it to mean something other than the death of their own self won't see their life saved.

"For them, Christianity exists to enhance their lives, their marriages, their bank accounts, their prestige," observes RK Hughes. "But to pay a price for standing for Christ, no thanks."

Jesus' words reveal the only way to life. To hug self is ruinous, but if we give ourselves to Him, He will give us real life, and make us the persons we are meant to be, says Hughes. Only in Jesus, losers are keepers.

In verse 25 Jesus said, "*for what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*" These words ring in our ears as we desperately try to redefine them to retain our desires and independence, instead of yielding to a life of dependence upon the Lord Christ.

DO YOU CRUCIFY YOURSELF? Galatians 5:24 says, "*those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires.*" This is a practical application of being in union with Christ, as a born-again believer.

"We ought everyday to crucify the flesh, to overcome the world, the flesh, the devil, to bring our bodies into subjection," notes JC Ryle, "under the command of the Master who says '*deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me.*'"

How can you trivialize these truths? Jesus is talking about your cross and your life. RC Sproul asks, "*where do you stand when the moment of truth comes, when your reputation or your life is at stake?*" The martyrs refused to compromise.

WHAT WILL YOU GIVE? The first Catholic saint martyred in China was betrayed for money, chained, tortured, tied to a wooden cross, and strangled to death. In 1840 in Wuhan, China. Now, very few of us today will likely be called to give our physical life in death for Christ. But if you think you're going to save your earthly life by hanging on to what you value here, think again.

The only two things that last forever are God's Word and other people, notes Sproul. So what are you doing to bring God's Word to other people, to give them the hope and promise of eternal spiritual life in Christ, here, now, and forever?

Whatever you exchange for your soul is a fool's exchange, unless you exchange for Christ's eternal spiritual life. The world needs to see that this is real, that it makes a difference.

People need to see in you that Jesus is indeed real, that His death and His life are real. They need to see how they change the world, your world, and their world. No more excuses from you. It's all about life and death. Serious business indeed. Eternal business.

ASHAMED OR AFFIRMED? In verse 26 Jesus said, "*for whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*" This puts it all into context. Life is not about this earthly existence, it's about eternal realities. This earthly life and all you value here is but a vapor. Gone like grass.

But God's Word is eternal, and your soul is eternal, as are the souls of other people. What are you doing about that? Are you ashamed to speak up for Christ? Always thinking there'll be another time? Ignoring God's divine appointments for you to talk with others about eternal things? Eternity is at stake.

And if you are obeying Jesus' words, to deny yourself, to take up your cross daily and follow Him, then you will not gain the world, but you will not lose your soul, and you will gain eternity. And you will not be ashamed of the Lord and His words. Are YOU a carrier of the cross of Christ? ☐