

# Taking Up Our Cross



Paul & Bunty Collins

We are living in very urgent and turbulent times. Our world is in turmoil. News reports of the great suffering and awful events that are occurring around the world are heartbreaking and so many times we feel so helpless and wonder “what on earth can we do?”

But there is an answer – the Gospel -- the “good news”! Now, as never before, we have to get the message out!

## THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

God’s love for mankind is the heart of the Cross. All three of the Godhead expressed this love.

### The Love of the Father

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” John 3:16.*

As young Christians we used to find it difficult to understand John 3:16. Why would it say it was the Father who so loved the world that He gave His Son? Surely, we used to think, the greater love was that of Jesus – he was the one who bore the rejection and suffering. He was the one who died for us. We thought this until we had our own son. Then we realized what great love the Father had. As a parent we would rather suffer anything ourselves than see our child suffer. What unimaginable grief the Father must have borne to see His beloved Son bearing upon himself the sin of the whole world!



**God the Father expressed the  
HEART of the Cross in the  
giving of His Son**

## The Love of the Son

The Lord Jesus declared ...

*“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” John 15:13.*



What he suffered on the Cross when he took all the sins of humanity upon himself is beyond comprehension. His cry “*My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46) gives us a small inkling to the awful reality of what it meant for the glorious, eternal Son to be separated from the Father. We can only appreciate the effects of it for ourselves, individually. And how we thank him and praise him for it!..dying for us to set us free and bring us into relationship with his Heavenly Father.

**Jesus, the Son of God, did  
the *WORK* of the Cross in  
dying for us**

## The Love of the Holy Spirit

Jesus, knowing he was about to fulfill the work of the Cross and would be leaving his disciples, gathered them together and made a wonderful promise to them (and to us)...

*“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” John 14:18.*

He was referring to the Holy Spirit whom he would send. After his resurrection he appeared to them and did exactly what God had done at the time of the creation of Adam...

*“...he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” John 20:22.*

The work of the Cross was finished, they had believed in him, and from that act of “breathing on them” they received the Spirit of God who had been lost because of sin



and they were “born again” (John 3:3). A short time later they would be empowered by the Spirit to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). The ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer had begun!

## The Holy Spirit leads the believer in the WAY of the Cross

### Living in the Way of the Cross

Jesus made a strange declaration to all those who were listening to him...

*“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” Luke 9:23*

Later he would say it again in Luke 14:27...

*“And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

Imagine how strange this must have sounded to those listening to him. The cross was a Roman method of executing someone guilty of a great and unforgiveable crime. The people had no idea that Jesus would, in a short while, die on a cross so there was no context for them to connect the statement with him. In saying they had to “take up” and “carry their cross” he was actually not referring to the awful means of death but the humiliating punishment of carrying the cross to the place of execution. That’s when the convicted person had to struggle with the bar of the cross over his shoulders through the throngs of people who had come out to jeer him and spit on him because of his crime.

Also notice, Jesus does not say to be his disciple they must take up *his* cross. No, they are to take up *their* cross. Jesus did the *work* of the Cross and that will never be repeated. That work transforms the life of the believer...

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” 2 Cor. 5:17.*

We can never do that work! That’s why Jesus had to come and take our place.



***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Corinthians 5:21.***

If we are trying to “crucify ourselves” to get rid of the old sinful nature we are in error. Jesus’ work on the Cross is a complete and finished work. As Romans 6:6-7 declares...

***“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”***

When reading Paul’s statement “I die daily” in context (1 Corinthians 15:12-32) we see he was not referring to trying to put to death his old sinful nature. He was speaking of the fact that, in preaching the Gospel, he literally faced the possibility of physical death every day.

What was the Lord Jesus referring to when he told us to take up, or carry, our cross? He was saying that his disciples had to be willing to suffer persecution – to be willing to be mocked and jeered at for the sake of seeing others come into the salvation of his finished work on the Cross. Taking up our cross is for the sake of OTHERS.



## **The Fellowship of His Sufferings**

In Philippians 3:10, Paul expresses the deep desire of his heart...

***“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...”***

“Fellowship” means to be at one with someone in heart and mind and purpose. In other words, Paul longed to know more and more the *heart* of the Lord

Jesus. To know his great love for people that caused him to be willing to face the sufferings on the Cross would reveal the wonder of who Jesus is in all his fullness and glory. Paul wanted to be so at one with the Lord that he would share the love the Lord had for people, to experience fully the love of God that had now been “poured into his heart” (Romans 5:5) overflowing to others.

In order for there to be a resurrection there first has to be a death. The result of this identification with the heart of God’s love in the fellowship of his sufferings would then be to experience the power of the resurrection expressed through us to others. These two things combined – God’s great love and the miracles resulting from the power of his resurrection – will see multitudes come to the Lord. How we as believers today need this! This is personally the cry and longing of our hearts as we go out to minister to others.



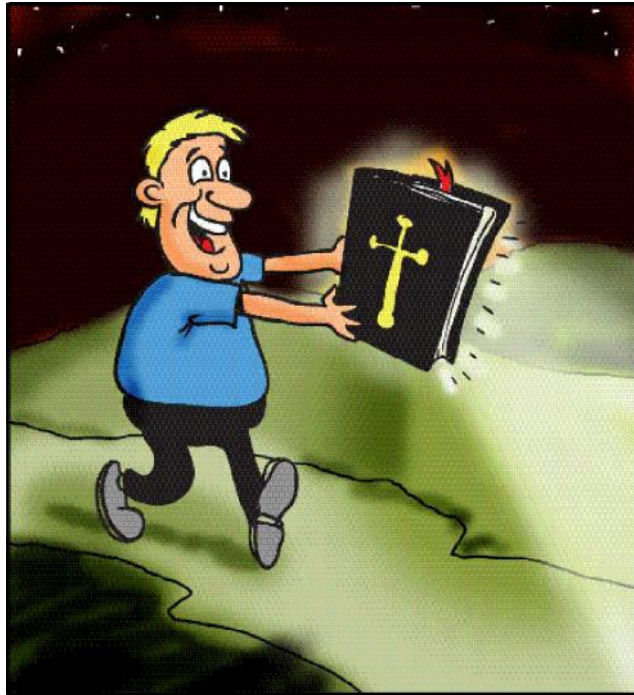
## EXAMPLES OF HOW TO LIVE

A number of times we have asked non-believers who they think is the greatest example of a Christian in our day and age. Without fail their answer has been the same - Mother Teresa. Why do they choose her? They are not interested in religious icons but see in her the reality of someone living like Jesus. The challenge to all of us is that we are epistles read by all those around us...

*“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men” 2 Corinthians 3:2.*

Mother Teresa was a woman who gave her life to help the poor of India. In her they saw the love of God in operation. This indeed is walking the way of the cross by the Holy Spirit – giving our lives to help others and seeing them come to know the Lord. We are not all called to do what Mother Teresa did

but we are all – each one of us – called to follow the Lord and walk the way of the Cross (read 1 Peter 4:12-16). Recorded in Heaven, through all the generations up to this day, are many unsung heroes of faith who have walked the way of the Cross.



Paul describes his life and ministry in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10...

*“We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”*

We must be careful not to fall into the same spirit of Esau who only wanted the Blessing but despised the Birthright (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-40). The Birthright was the right to be the one to fulfill God’s plan and purpose in his generation. The Blessing was having wealth and power on earth. But this was never meant for personal gain but was so that the Birthright could be fulfilled. The spirit of Esau, which is just wanting the wealth for a good life down on earth, is what God hates (Romans 9:13).

In our day, the merchandising of the Gospel by some is a great disappointment. Even in Paul's day it was happening. He says in 2 Corinthians 2:17...

***“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit”.***

This is not the heart of our Lord. Jesus was King of Kings, the creator of the universe, but he became the servant of all...

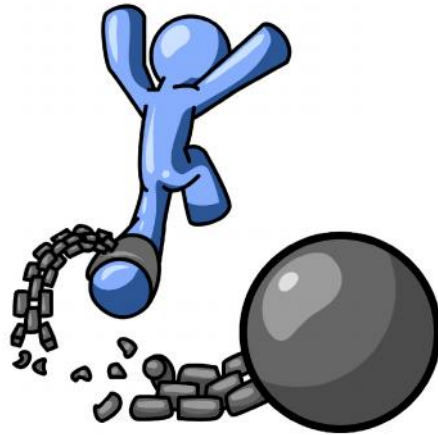
***“...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” Matthew 20:28.***

Paul, declared himself the love slave of Christ, called to be an apostle, i.e. one sent to the Gentiles with the Gospel (Romans 1:1). Before coming to Christ he had five aspects of life that gave him great status in the society of his day – good family background, religion, education, wealth, Roman citizenship (Philippians 3:3-9). In serving Christ, he lost them all and counted them as “dung” – useless rubbish – in comparison to knowing Christ.

## **SET FREE**

Not only has Jesus set us free from the guilt, judgment and power of sin, He has also set us free from the world – its ways, its focus and its motives.

God has given many wonderful promises in His Word in relation to meeting our needs and helping us in time of need...



***“...God is able to make all grace abound towards you that you, having all that you need, may abound to every good work”.***

***2 Corinthians 9:8 (see also Hebrews 4:16; Philippians 4:9).***

He is wonderfully faithful in his loving expression towards us. But we also have the privilege of joining with him to meet the desperate needs of others, both his believers and those who don't know him. We are called, as his disciples, to walk the way of the Cross. The Holy Spirit has been given to help us do this. This is our choice and this is what our world today is crying out for! The Early Church “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) in their generation. Now it is our generation needing to be turned upside down – or, the right way up! We need to take on the heart of the Early Church. All the believers...

***“... were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had” Acts 4:32.***

They were overwhelmed by the wonder of what had been done for them on the Cross and they saw the urgency of their day, holding nothing back of their possessions so that the world might be reached with the Gospel of Christ.

## The Greatest Joy is in the Way of the Cross



There is no greater joy than fulfilling the call of God to follow the Lord Jesus in the Way of the Cross.

*“...fixing our eyes on Jesus,  
the pioneer and perfecter  
of faith. For the joy that  
was set before him he en-  
dured the cross, scorning  
its shame, and sat down at  
the right hand of the throne  
of God”*

*Hebrews 12:2*