



FOLLOWING CHRIST JESUS IN THE LAST DAYS





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PREFACE

Much has been written about following the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely, much more will be forthcoming, given the inexhaustible scope of the subject, which includes the person and the meaning of who He is and what He requires of His followers.

What is written in this book are merely some personal reflections on the implications of following the Lord Jesus. It is my hope that what is written may be helpful to explain the gospel to those who are yet to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, the issues addressed are also very relevant to believers, as they deal with important principles that need to be assimilated in the process of discipleship and spiritual transformation.

The issues become more relevant and poignant in the last days as we await the second coming of the Lord Jesus and as the pressures from the world, the evil one and the desires of our self-life become more intense and pronounced.

QUEK KOH CHOON

April 2013



Dedicated to the 1973 Graduates of National University of Singapore, Medicine. Forty years ago, we embarked on the journey to offer “life” to those suffering from illnesses. On our fortieth anniversary since graduation, may I have the privilege to present to you this book which describes the most wonderful gift of life I have received. I trust that you also would taste and see that the Lord indeed is good!

Dedicated also to those seeking life and those who desire abundant life in Him.

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

1 John 5: 11-12



INTRODUCTION

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

Luke 9: 23

This is a verse often quoted in the sharing of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. At first glance, it seems to be a very difficult verse to receive and apply in our lives. In fact, you may even conclude that it appears that the Lord Jesus is making rather unreasonable demands on anyone who wishes to come after Him. Imagine asking you to deny yourself, to take up your cross before you can truly follow Him.

The cross, in the times of Jesus, meant certain death and a death that was very painful and agonizing. It was reserved for the worst of criminals. The one who hanged on the cross had to endure an excruciating prolonged process of dying, with sharp recurring searing pain, severe dehydration and breathlessness which went on and on until the person expired.

Is the Lord Jesus asking too much from those who would follow Him? Is it not legitimate to take care of yourself and to pursue what is helpful and productive in the development of yourself? Why insist on the denial of self and why is it necessary to carry the cross, and what does it mean to follow Him?

In the following chapters, we will address these various questions.





CHAPTER ONE

DENYING THE SELF

Let us first consider the issue of denying the self. Of all the creatures created, man is the only one created in the image of God. He is created to be God's representative in governing the world. He is meant to reflect God's image, His character and His ways of truth, righteousness and goodness. But the Bible recorded that man sought to be independent of God; he rebelled against God and became disobedient to Him, seeking to establish his own identity and kingdom, apart from God. In this rebellion, he was instigated by the evil one, Satan himself. Satan was an angelic being who wanted to be like God and he led a host of other spirit-beings in rebellion against the Almighty. His objective is to destroy God's kingdom and to cause man to follow him in his rebellion and his quest to establish his own kingdom against God.

God's good and noble intentions for man were hindered by man's sin and disobedience, which led to judgment and death for mankind. Physical death is the consequence that follows for all men. Spiritual death, a separation from a relationship with God and a true knowledge of Him, also follows.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 6: 23

The Bible reveals that God did not give up on man and in His love for him, He sent His own Son, Jesus, to make it possible for man to come back to Him.



“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

Jesus, the second person of God Himself, became man and although He was sinless, He suffered on our behalf and paid the penalty of our sin. He died, was buried but miraculously, He was resurrected and He rose again on the third day, ascending to the right hand of God the Father.

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”

1 Corinthians 15: 3-4

The way back to God becomes possible for those who acknowledge and repent of their sin and receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Repentance and acknowledgement of sin require one to come to God with a contrite heart and a humble spirit. This is contrary to the self. The self seeks to vaunt itself and to display its own glory. It does not desire to confess its needs of a savior; it does not wish to acknowledge that it requires help and deliverance. It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus declared that if any man would come after Him he must first deny himself – this is a prerequisite!

GOD’S SALVATION PLAN

God’s plan to save man from his sin and the penalty of sin is not a self-improvement plan. Rather, it is a new birth, more specifically a spiritual birth, a new creation made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit of God.



In replying to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a teacher of the law, who enquired about the kingdom of God, Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”* (John 3: 3)

The Apostle Paul echoed this truth in 2 Corinthians 5: 17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

For a new spiritual birth and creation to take place, the old must pass away. The “old man” must die before the “new man” is born and created. The old unrenewed self must be put off, put to death before the new regenerate self can come forth. If we believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him as our personal Savior and Lord, we are a new creation; we are born again into the family of God, into God’s kingdom and we are heirs of the inheritance in Christ. Our future is the new heaven and new earth, not eternal damnation and judgment.

It is only God’s mercy and grace that can draw unregenerate sinful man to come to a place of humble repentance and to cry out to God for mercy, deliverance and salvation in Christ. Oftentimes, it requires God to deal with the self-life of man before he can truly recognize his actual needs and depravity. Man, in his pomp, self-assurance and pride, feels that he does not need God and, in fact, even ridicules the idea of the reality of God and sin.

Self improvement can never work out in man’s desire to be right with God; it would only accentuate the wretchedness within although it may appear respectable in appearance on the outside. Martin Luther, the initiator of Protestantism and Reformation, was a monk who tried so hard to be right with God. In his biography by Roland H Bainton, we read:-



“Whatever good works a man might do to save Himself, these Luther was resolved to perform. He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb. Luther shared, ‘I was a good monk and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading and other works’. All such drastic methods gave no sense of inner tranquility. It was only when Luther saw that a man can only be saved by faith, which means belief that God was in Christ seeking to save, that Luther found himself reborn and felt himself to have gone through open doors into paradise.”

But even for those born again as believers, the ways of the “old man” still plague them. The ways of the “old man” are the ways and desires of the old self and the self-life (the flesh). They are to be dealt with by denying the self and putting these desires to death in the process of mortification of the flesh. Denying self is not just required for unregenerate man to come to the saving knowledge of God; it is also necessary for believers to progress in the transformation process to become like the Master, the Lord Jesus.

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-LIFE

Let us pause and consider: are not the problems facing society, Christians and the Church essentially problems of the self? Jealousy, envy, anger, pride, self-glory and the like – they are manifestations of self-life and the flesh. When someone corrects us, for instance, even out of love and concern, is not our first reaction a quick and prompt defense of ourselves and a putting up a case of self-justification? Often, when there are relationship problems in marriage, the family, the Church and society, is it not self-life and the self which are at the centre and root of the problems?



When the self or ego is hurt, the ugly manifestations of self-pity, outbursts of anger and violence surface. It is a mistaken idea that once we believe in Jesus, everything else will remain the same and that there is no need to change anything. Once we are born again into the family of God, God desires us to grow to be more like Him, to think like Him, to love like Him and to act and respond like Him. This process of transformation is not automatic. The soul must be cultivated and nurtured like a garden and part of this process requires the denying of the self and self-life.

The problem is that we love ourselves too much. We struggle to project a good front; think too highly of ourselves; have a wrong assessment of ourselves and others, and always think more highly of ourselves and less of others.

We do not know how weak and wretched we are until God exposes our real selves and our real needs. The self tends to consider God to be less than He truly is and to consider the self to be more than it actually is. In other words, we have an inflated opinion of ourselves and we honor ourselves the most – this is indeed what causes the most problems in our lives and relationships. When believers displace God's rightful place in their lives and think more highly of themselves than anybody else, including God, then pride and the flesh take hold of their lives and they are on the road to spiritual death and destruction.

The Holy Spirit of God will not fill a man or a woman who refuses to give over to Him the full control of his or her entire life; to do this requires denying the self and to hand over to God the full reign of our lives, trusting Him and knowing that He always has our best interests in mind and at heart. In other words, we must allow God to be Himself. He is the almighty awesome God of the universe and the one who created the heavens and the earth and everything that is, including you and me. We cannot put God in a box, limiting Him and expecting Him to be what we think He ought to be.



MINISTERS ALSO MAY BE AFFECTED

Even for believers who are serving God and ministering to others, the self can subtly rear its head without being noticed. Under the guise of serving God and His interests, we may subtly serve our own interests. We may claim to do various things for Jesus' sake, but in fact, it is for self-ambition and self-glory. There is a very fine line between seeking the glory of God and the glory of self and oftentimes, it may not be so obvious to others and even to ourselves. We may even genuinely desire to give the glory to God but at the same time, we would like to have a little remnant of the glory for ourselves. In other words, we can actually be seeking our own self-interest even in the midst of pursuing spiritual interests and serving God's people and His kingdom. Spiritual service may be used to promote our personal interests and desires knowingly or sometimes unknowingly.

This may be seen in what appears to be defense of the truth which subtly shifts into self-defense and the preservation of one's career and reputation. The best interests of the people being served become identified with the personal interests of the ministers concerned. Spiritual service slowly degenerates into the pursuit of self-promotion and the approval of the crowd rather than the spiritual well-being of those being served. Success in Christian ministry is not measured by numerical growth or financial prosperity but rather by faithfulness to God and an undistracted devotion to Christ, even in the midst of persecution, trials and pain. What is finally important is that the ministry is carried out in humility, in dependence on the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the truth revealed by Scriptures.

God is the only one worthy of all worship, honor and glory. We cannot claim any of God's glory, not even a fraction of it. The essence of sin is rebellion against God and a proclamation of being God of our lives. At the centre of it all is the projection of self and self-life as well as a declaration of self-glory. We see therefore how crucial it is for us



to deal with self-life and to deny the self. Believers, including leaders, are particularly susceptible to deceit that combines the language of faith and spirituality with the content of self-interest and flattery. In the midst of claims of serving God, we like to be told how special we are, how gifted we are and how much of a blessing we have been to so many. We beam at the feedback on how successful we have been in our ministry and we secretly cherish the request of others to share our know-how and approach in being so successful in building up such a wonderful and thriving ministry. Self-life begins to take hold of our hearts subtly.

Our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection is the basis of our salvation when we believe, but in daily outworking, denying the self is an expression of our union with Him in His death and burial. When we do this consistently, in dependence on God's Spirit, we will experience His resurrection life and spiritual victory as a result, and we will joyfully credit God with the glory.

DEALING WITH SELF-LIFE

Self-denial, however, is not attained by focusing on ourselves but rather, it is effected by God-centredness. The objective of self-denial is not just self-forgetfulness but Christ-centredness. As we reflect on God and spend time in His presence, it produces the kind of self-forgetfulness that blossoms into the beauty of Christian character, into Christ-centredness and this transformation is effected by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So when the Lord Jesus instructs us to deny ourselves, it is to save us from ourselves. For self-glory only ends up destroying us, our potential to become His children, bear His image, and to enjoy true happiness and pleasures which only God can give. Self and self-life lead us on the road that seems to promise life but the end of it is only death and destruction.



“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

1 John 2: 15-17

The ‘world’ here refers not to the physical world or the people of the world but rather to the spirit of the world seen in its desires. Satan has been described as the prince of the world in the Bible and indeed underlying the desires of the world are the manipulations of the evil one himself and his purpose is to fan the cravings of sinful man in order to cause him to be in bondage and to be under his control. Is it not true that the self expresses its cravings in wanting what the eyes can see and lust for, in terms of the pursuit of material possessions and comfort, the satisfaction of sinful pleasures and the desire of wanting more and more? It boasts of what it has and does; these have to do with the relentless chase after pleasure, self-gratification, status and reputation as well as the adoration of peers and society. The world and its desires pass away. They are fleeting, temporary, passing pleasures which the world and Satan dangle before man but they are illusions, like the mirage in the desert. Only God can provide eternal joy, eternal pleasure and happiness in offering man eternal life in His kingdom. Only by denying the self and the cravings of self-life can we take hold of that which are truly valuable and that which last forever.

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:18

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Psalms 16: 11



CHAPTER TWO

TAKE UP THE CROSS DAILY

WHY THE CROSS

We now go on to consider “take up the cross daily”. Self-denial and cross-bearing are closely related. In fact, the instrument that God uses to effect self-denial in our lives is daily cross-bearing. We have noted earlier that cross-bearing has to do with pain, suffering and certain death. Cross-bearing may be considered as a ‘higher’ form of self-denial, for both involve pain, suffering and death to the self and self-life. Cross-bearing is not the same as enduring some inconveniences in daily living but it has to do with saying ‘no’ to self and dying to self for the sake of others and for the glory of God and His kingdom, and encountering, in the process, pain, suffering and rejection from man, the world and the evil one.

We may be wondering why an instrument such as cross-bearing is essential in dealing with self-life and sin in our lives. It is only when we realize the depravity of our hearts that we understand the need for the strongest of medicine to deal with it and to get rid of self-intoxication. We must never underestimate the radical nature of the work that has to be done for us to become like the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand It?”

Jeremiah 17: 9

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Matthew 15: 19



Whatever is not like the Lord Jesus in our lives has to be eradicated and rid off and the cross is the instrument required to do this painful but necessary work.

Let us take a look at an interesting passage in John 15. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

John 15: 1-2

Those familiar with gardening will know that the purpose of pruning is to help the plant to bear more fruits. Pruning involves cutting off some parts of the branches so that what remain may be in a position to bear more fruit. The cutting off or the pruning of what are not helpful in our lives in order to make us more fruitful spiritually can be rather painful but it is necessary for fruitfulness. Leaving behind parts of branches which affect the whole plant negatively may not require the cutting off of unhelpful parts but in the long run, the whole plant would suffer. So it is for our spiritual lives. If we will not allow what is negative in our lives to be eradicated, it may be comfortable for the moment but in the long run, our spiritual lives would deteriorate. Cross-bearing may be likened to the pruning process in our spiritual lives.

What may be startling is to note that the one who does the pruning is the gardener and according to Jesus, the gardener who prunes is God the Father. Although cross-bearing may take place in our lives because of the affliction from men through persecution, attacks from the evil one and the negative spirit of the world, yet it is God who allows it in His sovereignty. God can, and does, work through the evil of man, to bring about good for His people. Just as the gardener's



intention for the plant is positive and good, so God desires good for His people and His intention is our ultimate well-being because of His love for us.

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

2 Corinthians 12: 7-9

Here the Apostle Paul revealed that God allowed him to be given a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble and to prevent pride from welling up in his life because he had been given great revelations from the Lord. But what is surprising is that the thorn is a messenger of Satan, given to torment the Apostle and although he pleaded with the Lord three times to take the thorn away, God’s answer is “no”. Nevertheless, God would give Paul sufficient grace to bear it and not leave him alone in his plight. For Paul’s ultimate good, God was willing to work through a messenger of Satan to help His apostle to remain humble and in his weakness, Paul learned to depend wholly on God’s strength.

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS IN JESUS’ SACRIFICE

At this juncture, to understand more fully the meaning of cross-bearing in our lives, it may be necessary for us to examine more closely the meaning of the cross in the death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.



Jesus, God incarnate, by His life and death at the cross, in obedience to God the Father, cancelled Satan's power of accusation against Him and all those to whom He gave His life. The devil's power was broken through the death of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 2: 14). When Jesus gave His life as a ransom for the sins of men, He paid the debt for them. His death obtained the remission of sins and removed the ground of accusations for the enemy. Satan can no longer be the accuser when Christ is the advocate and defender of those who are His.

At the cross, the sin of men has been dealt with, atoned for, washed away and forgiven; and hence the power of sin over the lives of men has been broken. No longer are believers under condemnation. Although final deliverance from the presence of sin and the attainment of perfection, to be like the Lord Himself, lie in the future when Christ comes again and ushers in the culmination of God's kingdom, God's people can now, with the enabling of the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, overcome the power of sin and live victorious lives in Him. They have access to enter the presence of God and in repentance, continue to receive forgiveness and restoration into fellowship with God whenever there is iniquity due to weaknesses.

One aspect of the message of the cross is that Jesus continues to love in spite of rejection and responds to violence and injustice with the almighty love of God. Hate, wickedness and evil are met by love from one who is an innocent victim. But the cross is not simply an example or model of great love. It is principally God's way of salvation and it is God's self-giving in the interest of sinful men. Sin is condemned by God in sending Christ in our nature and as a sacrifice for men. It is in fact God who makes the sacrifice, who comes in the person of the Son, who covers guilt for men. The cross is, in a real sense, the self-substitution of God for men in taking the penalty of sin due to men. It is God Himself who suffers. It is He who takes the



burden Himself. It is He, the one who loves us despite everything, who atones for our sin. The wonders and greatness of God's love is seen in the self-giving love of God revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Christ suffers the punishment of death according to the requirement of God's law. It is substitutionary in the sense that Christ, who has no sin, dies in the place of sinners; He dies on behalf of sinners. God's love for us, demonstrated in Christ's sacrifice on the cross for men, is the ultimate manifestation of self-denial and self-giving.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CROSS FOR US

As we ponder over the meaning of the cross in the sacrifice of Jesus for us, we can understand better the implications of cross-bearing in our lives. We would notice certain principles and values in operation: love, sacrifice, self-denial, self-giving and suffering in the face of rejection, securing forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, according to the requirement of God's laws and the upholding of the justice of God.

OTHERS-CENTERED

Cross-bearing is not just dealing with our self-life. It also involves showing God's love in our lives towards others who may not be deserving, for the sake of God's glory and for His kingdom. It is others-centered and the quality of this love is characterized by self-giving, self-denial and sacrifice in accordance with God's will and in line with His guidance and desires. It has no place for individualism which characterizes the lives of many in the current context and the emphasis on individual rights at the expense of the kingdom of God is contrary to God's calling for a people who collectively reflects the body of Christ and represents the temple of the Holy Spirit.



The Bible records that the Lord Jesus "...for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame..." (Hebrews 12:2). He looked forward to the salvation of many, to secure a people for God eternally, and for this, He was willing to endure the cross and to finish His mission on earth. For us as disciples of the Lord Jesus, cross-bearing would involve our willingness to suffer pain, persecution, misunderstanding and rejection and to respond with sacrificial love, in dependence on God's Spirit, to bring about salvation of many and to uphold the glory of God. However, this does not mean ignoring wrong-doing, sin, injustice and exploitations by evil and wicked men, for the Lord Jesus Himself also pronounced "woes" on the hypocrites and He was prepared to correct others in love for their ultimate good. Cross-bearing is always in line with God's will and is pleasing to Him when we suffer according to His wisdom and righteousness.

BENEFITS OF CROSS-BEARING

Carrying the cross, although it may involve much pain, suffering and at times perplexity, helps to bring us to a point of total dependence on God alone. The cross renders us helpless, weak, but in the helplessness and weakness, we find strength in God alone. The cross causes us to die to self, to our own abilities, ingenuity, even in the midst of Christian ministry, but it helps us to receive the life of God, which brings joy, peace and refreshment in the midst of dying and death.

Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission now known as Overseas Mission Fellowship, recalled a period in his ministry in China when he was rather ill and had to be virtually bedridden. He was rather anxious about the ministry as he was indisposed. However, the ministry seemed to be doing better when he was ill and Hudson Taylor had to humbly and soberly acknowledge that it was God who was doing the work and he was not indispensable. In his sickness,



weakness and helplessness, he learnt the meaning of the cross in serving God.

The cross may lead us to untold suffering and agony, but in the midst of suffering, it prepares us for and points us to the glory of God. It promises us the true glory to be like Him and to share with Him in His glory, reigning with Him and being with Him in the new heaven and new earth. The suffering is not without meaning; there is a purpose in the suffering and there is a glorious eternal future to look forward to. So what appears as perplexing, painful and not understandable is God's way of preparing His servant to truly be like Him, to depend wholly on Him and to rest deeply in Him now and forever.

The cross in the life of Jesus as the perfect man came before the resurrection. In Hebrews 5: 8-9 we read: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him..." The Apostle Paul understood this principle in his own life.

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Philippians 3: 10-11

The experience of a victorious Christian life and the power of the resurrection can come about only after learning to share in the fellowship of the sufferings of the Lord. The paradoxes of the cross: life coming forth from death; strength arising from weakness; glory attained through sufferings – they ring true in the outworking of the life of discipleship and indeed, resurrection power comes about only after experiencing the cross.



CHECK AGAINST TRIUMPHALISM

In this light, the cross acts as a “check” against triumphalism, a teaching and a belief that all the victories we will experience in the new heaven and new earth are available to us now. It is true that we have many blessings in Christ Jesus now as His children for which we ought to be thankful, but we need to be mindful that we are still living in a fallen world and we are still not free from persecution, suffering, the presence of sin and spiritual demonic assaults. True, there is much that is already ours as God’s people, but there is also much we do not yet possess which will be ours in the age to come. For instance, it is only in the new heaven and the new earth that there will be no more sorrow, no more pain and no more death. Not appreciating this may cause us to think that we have a right to live in financial prosperity and complete wholesome physical health and we look down upon those whose so-called ‘lack of faith’ causes them to be financially poor and perpetually in poor physical health.

In the book of Acts in the Bible, the Apostle Peter was miraculously freed from prison by God and yet, God did not save Stephen, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, from being stoned to death. If God were to save Stephen, it would appear to be a good testimony of Christian victory but Stephen’s manner of death, like that of the Lord Jesus, asking for forgiveness for those who stoned him, continues to inspire Christians through the centuries and certainly glorifies God who enabled a man to die so courageously and in such a godly way. His manner of death also affected Saul who later became Paul the Apostle and Stephen’s death actually triggered off persecution in the early Church which caused the believers to fan off from Jerusalem and thereby spread the gospel to the other cities. Our faith does not insulate us from trials, illnesses and sufferings. It enables us to “triumph” in our endurance and perseverance in the midst of our pain and suffering as we faithfully uphold God’s glory and express our confidence in His



goodness and faithfulness. In the famous chapter on faith in Hebrews 11, we read:

“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith...”

Hebrews 11: 36-39(a)

The men and women of faith are not only those who experienced healing from diseases, deliverances from demonic oppression and financial duress; they are also those who suffered like the brethren noted in Hebrews 11. And it is certainly true that those who suffered such fate are not those lacking in faith; on the contrary, they are those who exercise persevering and enduring faith in God and His promises despite the trials, and they look to the heavenly city and are prepared to carry their cross in this transition period. The Church is indeed built upon the blood of martyrs; not by those who sit in ivory towers and refuse to come out of the comfort zone.

But even in this transition period, we do enjoy countless blessings in Christ and certainly His resurrection power is available to all those who are one with Christ by faith. But it is a power for holiness, a power to testify for the Lord, a power to endure in trials and persecution, a power to overcome the flesh and to resist and reject the temptations and wiles of the evil one. It is also a power that is marked by humility, self-denial and sacrifice made possible by the love and enabling of the triune God.



The cross is at the centre of the true gospel. If we dilute the gospel or distort the gospel by removing the cross or rejecting its centrality, to make it more appealing to the hearers or to gain a large number of followers, we are committing a very serious error in the eyes of God. We need to resist all expressions of triumphalism; they only serve to dish out a gospel that is not consistent with the one true gospel revealed by God.

ANTIDOTE TO PRIDE AND BITTERNESS

The cross is also the antidote to boasting and bitterness in the believer's life. Knowing that the sinless holy Son of God went before us to the cross at Calvary for our sake because of His mercy, grace and love should only evoke deep gratitude and thankfulness in our hearts. Clearly, understanding the meaning of God's mercy and grace would leave no room for boasting, discouragement and bitterness. How can we be proud and bitter when we ourselves were not deserving of forgiveness, mercy and life from God in the first place? It is God's mercy and grace that has given us life instead of death, adoption as His children instead of rejection, forgiveness instead of judgment, a hope and an eternal future instead of despair and damnation. We would never ever doubt the love of God in Christ for us whenever we look at the cross.

Are we carrying our cross daily, with the appreciation of His sovereign saving mercy and grace in our lives, knowing that Jesus loves us to such an extent that He gave His life in our place on the cross?



CHAPTER THREE

FOLLOW ME

WHO ARE WE FOLLOWING?

We focus now on the later portion of verse 23 of Luke 9 – “follow me”. In considering this we need to begin by asking the question:- ‘who are we following?’ Jesus Christ is acknowledged by religious teachers from all walks of life and even by secular historians as a historical religious teacher who made a great and positive impact on the then known world. Even today, with regard to dates in history and calendar, BC and AD, and the year 2012 or 2013, these are written with reference to the time when Jesus was on earth. Millions, throughout many generations, have been impacted by the message and life of this man. Those whom society has given up as beyond hope and help, have their lives dramatically changed for the better when they encountered Jesus Christ in their lives.

What does the Bible reveal about who He was and what did He Himself claim to be?

HE CLAIMED DIVINITY

In encountering the Pharisees, a group of Jewish religious leaders, who challenged Him regarding His identity, Jesus declared:-

“...before Abraham was born, I am.”

John 8: 58(a)

The term “I am” in the Bible has been used with reference to the person of God. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush,



He declared to Moses – “I am who I am” when asked His name. When Jesus used the term “I am”, He was not just claiming to be around before Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was born, but He was in fact claiming to be God. In another incident, at a feast in Jerusalem, when confronted by the Jews about His identity, Jesus declared:

“I and the Father (referring to God the Father) are one”.

John 10: 30

To His disciple Philip who asked to be shown God the Father, Jesus replied:

“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?”

John 14: 9-10(a)

Yet again, before the Jews, who doubted Him, Jesus warned:

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?”

John 8: 44-46



Here Jesus challenged them to prove Him guilty of sin; in effect, He was claiming sinlessness – an attribute of God. We see here also a reference to the devil. The devil or Satan is not a figment of imagination but a real evil spiritual being. There are many more passages which clearly taught that Jesus is divine.

HE WAS TRULY GOD AND TRULY MAN

We have seen clearly that Jesus Christ claimed to be divine, God Himself, not just a good man or a religious teacher but the very being of God. At the same time, the Bible revealed that Jesus, when He was on earth, was fully man. He was truly God and truly man, something hard to understand and may appear rather mysterious but nevertheless, it is true according to revelation. As a man, Jesus was noted to know hunger (Matthew 4: 2); He was thirsty (John 4: 7); He was tired (Luke 8: 23) and he expressed emotional pain (John 11: 35). As fully man, He encountered all that human beings encountered on earth, including going through difficulties and pain in meeting temptations, misunderstanding from others as well as physical trials. Yet throughout all these, the Bible revealed that Jesus was sinless, without sin. Some may conclude that He probably used His divine power to overcome all the difficulties and trials but this would not explain Him as fully man. In fact, Jesus as the God-man chose not to exercise His divine power and attributes in order to live within the limitations of being truly human.

He opted to experience the world through the limitations He took upon Himself in order to be fully man even though His divine attributes were still present in Him but not voluntarily exercised by Him. As such, He experienced time and space events within the confines of a normal human being and became the perfect example of how a man should live before God. As fully man and sinless, He could take the place of sinful men and die on behalf of sinners. But how, as fully man, without



exercising His divine power and attributes, did Jesus remain sinless? Jesus Christ, the God-man, was fully obedient to His father's will (Hebrews 10: 5-7) and He always did what was pleasing to the Father. He did all these as a human, totally dependent on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. His was an increasing reliance and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to conquer the enemy of God. Jesus, the man, was continually energized by the divine power of the Spirit of God (John 3: 34). In this regard, Jesus Christ was and is the supreme example for us. He showed us what is possible in a human life, how we may exceed the limitations of our humanness to fulfill God's desire for us against all odds in life. He demonstrated for us how a human being is intended to live in God's eyes.

IMPLICATIONS OF FOLLOWING HIM

(A) FOLLOWING HIM AS LORD AND MASTER

As we follow Jesus Christ, we need to acknowledge that we are following one who is truly divine. He is our creator and all authority belongs to Him. He is also a God who is not distant, but one who entered into human history to rescue us and to bring us back to Him.

As truly God who is perfect, it is only in order that He requires obedience from us. And obedience is expected and required for our own well-being; disobedience would only lead to spiritual death and destruction. Just as an earthly father expects his child to obey in order to protect him from harm and injury, God our heavenly father sees obedience on our part as needful for our own good. Obedience is also an expression of our love for Him as we acknowledge that His requirements are in line with His divine love and care for us His children.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

John 14: 15



*“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is
the one who loves me..”*

John 14: 21(a)

We need also to exercise faith as we follow Him as our Lord and God. Faith is essentially trusting Him in His being and in His promises. Jesus Christ has gone before us as the first fruits. As He has been resurrected, we will also be resurrected when He comes again. Jesus declared this whilst on earth, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...”* (John 11: 25-26(a))

Jesus revealed that He has gone to prepare a place for His people and He would come back to take those who belong to Him to be where He is. He also told His followers to expect trouble in this world but not to lose heart as He has overcome the world. He encouraged His followers to persevere and to endure, and surely they would see the salvation of the Lord. When He comes again, He will judge the world and make right what is wrong and unjust. We need to keep our eyes and focus on Him as we follow Him here in this transition period until we see Him face to face. Indeed, the just shall live by faith; followers of the Lord Jesus need to continue to trust Him and to affirm His faithfulness in His promises even in the midst of persecution and tribulation. He is completely reliable and trustworthy and circumstances do not change this truth. In that light, God’s people need not lose heart but they continue to live with confidence in the hope they have in Christ Jesus.



(B) FOLLOWING HIM IN HIS ATTITUDE

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2: 5-11

Notice the attitude of Christ Jesus. Although He was God, He did not cling on to this, but He willingly made Himself nothing and took on the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and humbled Himself to a point of dying on the cross for the sake of redeeming a people for God’s own possession. There is no actual example in our own experience to understand this but perhaps, we can ponder on a hypothetical example of a man becoming an ant, giving up all his rights and abilities as a man, suffered and died cruelly “at the hands” of a colony of ants on its behalf in order to save the colony from extinction. Even this cannot fully explain the profound reality of Jesus, God Himself, becoming man and a servant in order to die for the sin of man and to bring him back into the kingdom of God.

It is the almighty God, creator of the universe, the one who holds all things together, who went down so low and to a point almost unbelievable, becoming man and dying like a criminal on a cross. The apostle Paul exhorted believers to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. Unless we deny ourselves and carry our cross daily,



we cannot hope to have such an attitude. It is an attitude devoid of selfish ambition or vain conceit; it is an attitude that considers others better than ourselves and one that looks not only to one's own interests but also to the interests of others. Jesus demonstrated such an attitude when He became man to die for the sin of man and to save him from judgment and condemnation. Following Jesus would mean nurturing such an attitude as His disciples and this we can only do with the enabling of the Holy Spirit and by His grace.

Contrast the attitude of Jesus with that of some spiritual leaders today. They are quick to give a list of their accomplishments, successes in ministry, academic achievements and the number of books they have written and the many invites they receive throughout the year. This is not much different from those in the secular world. Whatever happens to humility and meekness that God desires so much to be manifested in His servants?

(C) FOLLOWING HIM AS A SERVANT

“For even the Son of Man (referring to Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10: 45

In this verse, we see the Lord Jesus declaring that He came to serve and not to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many. This is closely related to His attitude expressed in Philippians 2.

His humble attitude was manifested in His willingness to be a servant of others, to give His life to ransom man from the bondage of sin. As His disciples we are also called to serve others and to serve one another in love and with humility. This calling is clearly seen in the passage John 13: 13-15. This describes the well known scene when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Such a task is only undertaken



by a servant. After washing their feet, the Lord Jesus made a startling statement:

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”

John 13: 13-15

Following the Lord Jesus would mean the preparedness to be servants of others and to serve others for Jesus’ sake. This is surely contrary to self-life, for the self does not wish to take on such a “demeaning” role. It is no surprise that denying the self and carrying one’s cross must precede following Jesus.

Genuine godly servants of the Lord Jesus would follow the example of the Master to seek to serve and not to be served. They are not in the ministry with the objective of increasing their reputation, lifestyle and bank account at the expense of those they are ministering to. The “servant attitude” would mean not “lording it over” those who are led by them and certainly they would not demand unqualified loyalty and total obedience to them such that believers in their context no longer have the freedom to look to the Spirit and the Bible to guide them in their personal lives and decisions.

There is a tendency among believers to value gifts above character in Christian ministry. The Church may also be guilty of overlooking the spiritual maturity of an individual because he or she seems to manifest extraordinary spiritual gifts. At times, even obvious moral failure and doctrinal errors are conveniently dismissed because the individual apparently made a significant impact in the ministry. This is certainly contrary to the call to self-denial, humility and a servant attitude.



(D) FOLLOWING HIM IN DOING GOD'S WILL AT ALL COSTS

Much can be looked into regarding the values and character of the man Jesus. Yet what perhaps crystallizes His focus when He was on earth as a man is seen in the following:-

“He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

Matthew 12: 48-50

“Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”

Matthew 26: 39

What is common in these two passages is doing the will of God the Father. The Lord Jesus counted those who do God's will as His kinsmen and family. Even for Himself, as He agonized regarding going to the cross, His final statement and stand to God His Father was “Yet not I will, but as you will.”

It can perhaps be said that Jesus' consuming passion, whilst on earth, was to do the will of God the Father no matter what it costs and that took Him on the road to suffering, mocking, scourging and death on the cross at Calvary. It was a road that demands obedience through sufferings, pain and rejection by those He came to save; unjust treatment by men and those in authority; betrayal and abandonment by those closest to Him and finally separation from His Father with whom He has eternal and intimate fellowship, because He carried the sins of



the world upon His shoulders. He could have summoned legions of angels under His command to deliver Him, but He remained steadfast on the cross until it is finished. He could have struck His perpetrators with a word of command but He was silent like a lamb led to the slaughter.

All these He did to do the will of His Father. He denied Himself; He did not follow His own will and desire; He took the cross, endured it and remained on it until His mission was accomplished, in the midst of mockings, agonizing and searing pain, breathlessness and thirst and the unleashing of all the powers of darkness upon Him. In a sense, Jesus went “through hell” on our behalf.

As we follow Jesus our Lord, are we following Him with grumblings, complaints, a sense of entitlement, self-pity and a cry for immediate relief from situations very much less painful and agonizing as those encountered by Him whilst He was on earth? Do we turn back from the path God has given us and insist on our will rather than His? Do we cry out “unfair!”, “not worth it” as we compare ourselves with people of the world and with brethren who seem to go through life so smoothly and without any endurance of suffering and persecution? Remember the consuming passion of the Lord Jesus whilst He was on earth and let us not be weary. We need to persevere so that when we have done the will of God, we will receive what He has promised.

PROVISIONS FOR FOLLOWING HIM

At this juncture, we may feel that is impossible, in our own strength, to fulfill the calling of the Lord Jesus. How can we possibly follow Him when the standards set are so high and beyond our reach. Thanks be to God! – we are not left on our own. God has given us ample provisions to help us to finish the race here until we reach our final destination.



CHRIST'S INTERCESSION FOR US

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come”.

Ephesians 1: 18-21

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them”.

Hebrews 7: 25

The Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead and He is alive, sitting at the right hand of God the Father, in a place of almighty power and authority, above every dominion and power of this age and the age to come. From this position of power and authority, He intercedes for us constantly and He is also our advocate before the Father. He understands our struggles and He sees our motives and our hearts. Although we still stumble into sin, there is always forgiveness whenever we come to Him in repentance. He upholds us in prayers and He always look out for the welfare of His people. Indeed, the Lord Jesus is able to save completely all those who come to God through Him.



PROVISION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus as a man on earth cannot be with all His followers at the same time. He knew that the followers still need His help, guidance, encouragement and presence to carry on when the time comes for Him to leave to return to the Father. As such He told them:-

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

John 14: 16-20

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

John 16: 7

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

John 16: 13-16



God the Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the third person of God, to be with the believers and to dwell in them. The Holy Spirit can be with and in all the believers all over the world at the same time because He is not limited by time and space and He will take what is from the Father and from the Lord Jesus and make it known to His people. He is the teacher, the guide, the comforter, the counselor, the one who empowers His children to live for the glory of God, for He is God Himself. Jesus' presence in His followers is by the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. Indeed, we are not alone and as the Lord Jesus had said, "I will not leave you as orphans". It is the Holy Spirit who is principally responsible for molding us and transforming us into the image of the Lord Jesus and He, the Spirit, will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in our lives as we walk in Him and live by Him.

PROVISION OF THE WORD OF GOD

"Jesus answered, 'It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4: 4

This was the answer Jesus gave to the devil, when, after fasting forty days and forty nights, the tempter tempted Him to use His power to change stones to become bread. Although He was extremely hungry, Jesus did not succumb to the temptation. Instead, His answer focuses on what truly matters in living before God. God has provided His written word in the Bible and His children should look to the Bible for God's revelation and principles in order to live lives that are pleasing to God. In this world we live in, there are many voices that seek our attention and response. In the midst of these many voices, we need to listen out to the voice of our Lord and God. Often, His voice is heard as we prayerfully, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, read the Bible and understand the teachings and revelations in the Scripture. He can also



speak to us through the brethren, through hymns and through circumstances if we are sensitive to His Spirit and His promptings. The Word of God, when expounded in worship services, ministers to us and helps us to respond by being doers rather than just hearers only.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3: 16

Believers cannot afford to be ignorant of the Bible. We need to be good students of the Bible so that we can correctly handle the Word of truth. Knowing the truth will set us free and will prevent us from being led astray by false teachers and false prophets. We need to spend time studying the Word of God individually and together with the brethren and we must constantly be open to the Holy Spirit making the Word alive to us in various contexts. We need also to develop convictions regarding the teachings in the Bible; in this regard, our convictions should help us to distinguish what are true from what are false. We must not come to a point where we are afraid to give the feedback that an opinion or a teaching is wrong biblically. We have no right to treat as optional what God has said and affirmed in the Bible. We might feel that we are being tolerant and understanding by not speaking up for the truth; in fact, we may actually be compromising and diluting the truth in outworking. The Bible reveals that Satan can dress up as an angel of light. False teachers and false workers can do likewise and diluting and compromising the truth or emphasizing one aspect of truth at the expense of the complete wholesome truth may be an effective tool of deception employed by the evil one and his agents.

But what about the reliability of the Bible, some of us may wonder? It is helpful to note that more copies of Bible manuscripts exist than for any other ancient book (more than 5000 Greek



manuscripts of the New Testament alone). These copies have been declared historically reliable by hundreds of experts ranging from archaeologists to theologians. In other words, the Bible has been transmitted accurately from the time it was originally written. The Bible is correct when it deals with historical people and events; it remains true and relevant to all people for all times. More importantly, although the Bible consists of many books covering a span of many years, written by different ones who were enabled and guided by God Himself, the message of the Bible is a unified complete whole. It is the Word of God!

PROVISION OF THE CHURCH AND THE BRETHREN

As we seek to follow the Lord Jesus, we need to remember that God calls us to be members of His family and part of the Church of God. We are not meant to be alone or individualistic; we need to be part of the local Church in our local context.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the DAY approaching.”

Hebrews 10: 24-25

The DAY refers to the day of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we await the second coming of the Lord Jesus in this transition period, let us be mindful to be vigilant as we have a formidable enemy in the evil one and there are spiritual dangers abounding. God has provided the Church to keep His people during this period.



The Lord Jesus has invited us to follow Him and we need to keep our focus on Him during our pilgrimage on earth. He warned us that there would be false Christs and false prophets who seek to lead the people of God astray (Matthew 24: 5,11). They can do miracles and they are also adept in using and quoting the Bible. The Lord revealed that we will know the tree by its fruit; the true servant of God would manifest the fruit of the Spirit and he would look like the Lord Jesus in his character, holiness, attitude and his desire to honor God and glorify Him. True godliness is essentially built on character, not charisma; it is grounded on virtue, not visions; it is centered on Christ and a Christ-exalting gospel and not on self or a display of power or heightened states of ecstasy. The true servant of God will not teach principles contrary to the Bible and he will uphold the authority of Scriptures. Worldliness and self-promotion are not on his agenda; instead the true servant is prepared to “decrease” so that Christ may “increase”, and his greatest joy is to give all glory to his Master. Belonging to a healthy local church with godly teaching and guidance would help the believer to steer clear from false teachers and false influence.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING JESUS

“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

Luke 9: 24-25

The gospel of Matthew puts it in the following way:-

“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Matthew 16: 26

The Lord Jesus is highlighting for us the seriousness of the issue in terms of the consequences. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for the Lord Jesus will save it. The Lord is telling us that if we cling to this temporary life that the world can offer, in terms of what the spirit of the world entices us with, we would lose the eternal and true life, which God offers in Christ, that abides forever. Even if we were to gain the whole world and forfeit our souls, it is not worth it. For many of us, gaining the whole world is out of our reach. We might only gain a small fraction of the world and even this small fraction may cause us to be shortsighted and we cling to it at the expense of our souls and eternal destiny.

HELL IS REAL

The Lord Jesus spoke much more than anyone else on the subject of hell and the reality of eternal judgment.



“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

Matthew 18: 8-9

So terrifying is the prospect of hell that it might be better to be maimed or blind in this life than to be thrown into hell subsequently. The Lord Jesus Christ will send out His angels and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13: 41-42).

Some apparently said that they do not mind going to hell because all their friends will be there. Obviously, they do not realize the terrible judgment awaiting them in hell. It will be in a fiery furnace burning in an eternal fire that goes on and on forever, and the fire is not quenched. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth that last for eternity (Matthew 9: 48).

There are serious eternal consequence in rejecting Jesus as Savior and Lord and pursuing a life of sin and disobedience to God. This is not a fairy tale. It is real and ever so true. Our eternal destiny depends on our response to follow Him or to reject Him. Whether you are one who has not believed in Jesus or you are one who happens to go to Church as a way of life, but yet in reality, you do not really know Jesus, take note that the issue involved is an issue of eternal life or eternal death. God has given ample warnings in the Bible. When we come before the judgment seat of Christ, it may be too late.



JUDGEMENT IS SURE

Hell is actually reserved for Satan and his demons. Unfortunately, those who worship him and follow him would follow him into the place of damnation. Adam's failure was not just a personal sin – it was a disaster at a cosmic level; it allowed Satan to gain the world which God had intended for Adam to rule. Satan became the prince of this world and the god of this age.

Jesus, the Son of God, appeared, took on our human nature, shared our flesh in order to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 12: 14-15). He came to undo the disaster that Adam had effected. By tasting death for us and rising again in power and glory, Jesus would bring about the pardon of our sins according to God's righteous judgment. He removed the power of sin and death that Satan held over us. What appeared to be a tragic defeat at the cross for Jesus was in fact the greatest triumph over the evil one. In fact, all the powers of death and hell were exhausted in Jesus at the cross.

What Jesus did on the cross guaranteed our victory in Him but it is not the end of the battle. The devil knows that his time is short and he is full of rage (Revelation 12: 10,12). Spiritual warfare continues and believers must know that we are waging war against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6: 12). Nevertheless, ultimate victory is secure; every knee would bow to the Lord Jesus in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The devil who deceived the world would be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, that is hell. The dead, great and small, would stand before the judgment throne of God and they would be judged according to what they had done. Anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life would be thrown into the lake of fire and



they would be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20: 10, 12-13).

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF GOD'S GIFT

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it”.

Matthew 13: 44-45

When Jesus calls us today to deny self, to take up the cross and to follow Him, He is calling us to possess a treasure of great price. The treasure is so precious that nothing can compare with it – it is the treasure of being accepted into the kingdom of God and to spend eternity in wondrous fellowship with God and His people. Do we value and realize the preciousness of God's gift that is offered to us in His Son, Christ Jesus? Do we appreciate that it is worth much more than anything the world and the enemy can offer us?

Let us be wise in not rejecting God's gift in His Son Jesus. Let us not live for the moment and be mesmerized by what is temporary and passing away. Let us instead take hold of the treasure that is precious and eternal. It may involve rejecting what the prince of this world, Satan, offers us; we may appear foolish to the world but in fact, we are truly wise in giving up what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose forever!



THE SALIENT POINTS

To recapitulate – Christ died as a sacrifice for man’s sin; He died to make reconciliation for man’s transgression; He died to purge our sins by the offering of Himself; He died to redeem us from the bondage of sin and death and He died to satisfy the justice and righteousness of God. He died to deliver those who follow Him from the condemnation of judgment and hell, which we fully and rightly deserve. He lives (following resurrection and ascension) to mold us and make us a holy people of God, to inherit the new heaven and new earth and to share His glory, reigning with Him through all eternity.

We are sinners, all of us, but Christ has borne our sins; we are helpless debtors but Christ has paid our debts; indeed He has paid a full and completed ransom for those who believe. The person who comes to Christ by faith should never doubt Christ’s willingness to receive him. All the unwillingness is on the part of the person, not of Christ.

Christ Jesus, as the second Adam, inaugurates a new people of God; He became the head of a new body of believers; He is the bridegroom of the bride, comprised of all believers from all generations. As the first fruits, the resurrected Christ will resurrect all believers to inherit the new heaven and new earth, and to receive eternal life in God. There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He has ascended to the right hand of the Father after the resurrection and He will come again to bring all those who are His to be with Him forever. Will you be among those whom He will receive?

Will you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him?



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