

## Take up your cross – Matthew 16:21-28

**Opener: "Take up your Cross" >>> "the Christian martyrs' last prayer"**

**Series tie-in:** New Year's resolutions about things that matter. If we are Christians, let's not be decorative, name-only, cultural Christians. Let's be real Christians, Christians who are disciples, Christians who follow Christ.

**Big Question: What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?** Great Question, but first we need to answer another one:

### Part One: What did it mean for Jesus to be the Christ? V21-23

**21** From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

**22** Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

**23** Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

**Illustration: Basketball hoop, 2 nuts**

**left out >> Peter missed 2 impt things**

Context: Js has just asked his discs who they think he is. Peter replied, v16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It's one of those big moments of the Gospel! This is not something Peter just figured out; it has been revealed to him by God! It is the foundation of the church! It isn't time to go public yet, v20, too many people – the discs included – have the wrong idea about what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. Too many of the Jewish ppl think, "when the Christ comes, he's going to kick every last Roman butt out of here and set up God's kingdom! What a great plan!

No, that's not the sort of king Jesus will be. He couldn't be more different. Let's look at his plan in v21... WHAT?! The bit about being raised from dead sounds interesting, but ...WHAT?! Suffer? Be persecuted by the leaders of your own people? Be KILLED?! That's not how to be a great king! And Peter feels duty bound to tell him so, v22...

V23 – Get behind me Satan! (temptation)

Stumbling block (trap)

Things of God/things of men (*Isaiah 55:8 - my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,* declares the LORD .

**Application: two important things to remember:**

- 1) Jesus' suffering and death were all part of God's plan to save the world**
- 2) Js didn't just promise he would die, he would also RISE AGAIN. God had power to give us life first time and he will do it again! That's what's behind...**

## Part two: what does it mean to follow Christ? It means the Cross. V24-28

**24**Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25**For whoever wants to save his life <sup>f68</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. **26**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? **27**For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. **28**I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Js has just said, as clear as crystal: being the Christ means he will suffer and die. It's absolutely central to who he is. His disciples, the people he is talking to, need to understand it. What a bombshell!

And v24 is another bombshell...

People in Rom empire knew what Crucifixion looked like. Unmentionable! "If you want to be my follower, you have to follow me all the way."

**Deny himself** – you are not your own master

**Take up your cross** – the crossbar; humiliating walk to death.

But it **makes sense**: three reasons

V25 – Live for the here and now >> that's all you get.

(just as God will raise Christ from the dead, he has the power to raise his followers too. Throw your lot in with Christ, you live. Live for yourself, you die.)

V26 – Jesus can save your soul, the most valuable thing you have.

(even if living for yourself now gains you the whole world, you won't enjoy it much without a soul!)

V27 – Jesus will judge you.

(If you are on his side, you have nothing to worry about. If you served yourself as king, you are a rebel with nobody to speak in your defence.)

V28 >>> won't taste death before they see Jesus coming in his kingdom? Unsure, but probably talking about the resurrection.

**Illustration: Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die

**Application: How do you take up your cross? EVERY area of life! But a few eg's...**

- 1) Approval: I die to my need for other people...just want God's approval**
- 2) I am proud to call myself a follower of Christ. Curse me, kill me, I don't care.**
- 3) Christ comes first: before my ambition, heart, even physical safety**

**Why? Because we trust God! We know that his plans and promises work.**

**He has a plan for us and he raises the dead. He is worthy of our trust.**

Initially, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's parents discouraged him from studying theology.

The Bonhoeffers were an upper-middle class German family of doctors and scientists, so going into ministry was not thought to be a fitting profession for their sixth child.

It's a good thing for the modern Church that Bonhoeffer was determined in his course. There's no doubt that Bonhoeffer is one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century.

Bonhoeffer's thoughts are powerful in and of themselves, but even more so in the context of his circumstances. As a pastor in Germany in the era between WWI and WWII, he saw firsthand the subtle shifts in the German church and the German consciousness.

Many of Bonhoeffer's actions seem nonsensical when viewed with an objective eye. He split from the German Church to form the Confessing Church, he got involved in an assassination plot (against Hitler), he returned to Germany from the safety of the U.S. right before the war reached its worst. But put all together, they reveal the story of a man of great conviction, who was willing to go against the norm and undergo suffering for his people and for the God he was committed to following. He was a man who, by the end of his life, really understood the cost of discipleship he famously wrote about.

On April 9, 1945, Bonhoeffer was killed at a concentration camp—just a few months after his 39th birthday. But his legacy continues. Even today, 71 years after his death, Bonhoeffer's life is a challenge to us all to pursue justice even when it's not popular, to care for and defend the persecuted and to relentlessly follow God's leading.

Read more at <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/books/12-essential-bonhoeffer-quotes#vPaWEK8RUEMXoLDK.99>