

THEY WANT JESUS, BUT NOT HIS CROSS

YOU ARE EITHER TOTALLY COMMITTED, OR TOTALLY OUT



As predicted in the Word, the days that we are already in are the times that will be known for a turning away from the truth, and a deception on a level that human intellect cannot fathom.

³Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ⁴Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. – 2

Thessalonians 2:3-4

Those who drive the deception are not capable of conjuring up the evil they do. It must therefore be driven by someone else – the deceiver, the devil himself. Yet, even in the church we see deception. People impress others with their preaching, and talk about Jesus, but the cross of commitment is nowhere to be found. The deception we are witnessing today is that a life committed to Jesus Christ is not necessary. In fact, the reality of the cross, death and resurrection are often denied and relegated to the pages of history.

Many people's image of Jesus is that of the paintings of the Renaissance period, showing a meek and mild Jesus with a halo above His head, and little children and lambs on His lap. Paintings like these were some of the first examples of preaching an "accessible Jesus", one who liked everybody and invited them into His kingdom without any prerequisites. The reality of Jesus' life was rather different. Pursued by the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Him, His message was that if you wanted eternal life, you had to lay down your own life, be crucified in yourself, and follow Him. The concept of the cross, and the act of crucifixion, was truly horrifying, more so when the One who hung there was innocent. Most people though, do not want to confront the reality of the cross and be crucified in themselves. They want a convenient faith in Jesus and an easy road to heaven. What they do not want is denying themselves the current comfortable life they lead. Faith is fine, but in measures, and then only when and where it suits them. This is the deception that is being preached as fact.

Luke explains this very well in the ninth chapter of his gospel. When He sends out His disciples, He tells them not to take anything on their journey. They should be focused on preaching the message. God Himself will take care of their daily needs while they are on their way. After this, the focus shifts to the feeding of a multitude of people. Jesus then draws the disciples into a discussion, as He always did, which was His teaching style. He asks them first who the people say He is and then asks them who they think He is. As always, Peter is first with an answer. Jesus then starts to narrow down the discussion and focuses on the essentials – that He would be slain (verse 22), implying His crucifixion. Then He confronts them with this: if you want to follow Me, you have to deny yourself, **take up your cross**, and follow Me. He emphasises this by saying that if you consider your life to be important, you will lose it anyway (verse 24). On the contrary, he who abandons his ambitions and follows the Messiah, will save his life.

Later on, He switches attention away from the disciples to people around Him. In verse 57 He meets someone else who confidently says he will follow Jesus wherever He goes. The

response? Be ready to give up everything, even basic accommodation, if you want to follow Me. It appears Jesus had no fixed address. When He asks another to follow Him, the response is that he first wants to take care of the dead. It may be his father, but the point is that you really can do nothing for the dead. Another says that he will follow Him, but he first needs to say goodbye to his family. Jesus's response is stunning – if you have decided to follow Me, there is no turning back. You cannot plough a straight line while looking backwards. If your heart and treasure lie behind you, these are what you will follow, not that which is ahead of you. Lot's wife did the same, and she paid the ultimate price.

In all of the above cases the following is clear: sort out your domestic affairs before you decide to be crucified in the self and then follow Jesus, or else, if the opportunity comes to you before you have said your goodbyes and buried the dead, decide who is more important.

Whose side are you on? Do you follow a Christian life of convenience or conviction? Convenience is about the person – me, myself, my and I. What is in it for **me**? To what extent can I depend on **myself**? How can it get it **my** way? **I** want this, **I** want that. Conviction on the other hand, is the form of faith that is about trust in Jesus. How can what I do glorify **Him**? To what extent do I depend on **God** to pull me through? What is **His** will for me in every aspect of my life? What does **He** want for me? There is probably no better verse to summarise this than in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia:

²⁰I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. – **Galatians 2:20**

I can write it like this: I have identified with the goals Christ has for me. I have put my trust in Him, abandoned my own ideas, and died to myself. I still live, but it is not really me people see anymore. They see Jesus in me. Although I am still alive as a human being, I have abandoned my desires to depend on Him in faith. After all, it was He who loved me first, and took on Himself the burden of my sins and sacrificed His life on Earth so that I may have eternal life.

This requires total commitment on a daily basis, and we often fail in this. However, it should not prevent us from confessing our shortcomings and pushing forward towards the ultimate goal. Carrying the cross we have been given means seeing daily how others are what we are not; have what we do not have; succeed where we have failed; and many other areas. This cross was tailor-made for us. God would have it no other way. This is how Paul experienced it:

¹³Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. –
Philippians 3:13-14

CONCLUSION

Paul presses towards the prize, eternal life, but it cost him his life. Did he mind? Absolutely not. He counted his life as nothing (Acts 20:24) when compared to the life he would lead in heaven. In the end, we cannot claim to follow Jesus and have a victorious life in Him when we do not also commit to Him fully, associate with His suffering, and accept the same ridicule those who followed Him had to endure.