



**“And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).**

### **The Way of the Cross**

**Central Truth:** The essence of discipleship is self-denial for Jesus' sake.

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**Topic:** Christ: Death of; Self-Denial.

There can be no Christian where there is no cross. The cross is essential to salvation and to sanctification. No one can be saved without the benefits secured by Jesus in His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. No one can be sanctified without taking up his cross and bearing it after Jesus.

Unless a believer takes up his cross and follows Jesus, he cannot be a true Christian disciple. That rule applies to missionaries, evangelists, pastors, Bible teachers, and every other believer in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said, “*WHOSOEVER will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Mark 8:34).

The key to Christian discipleship is submission to the will of God. (Do you remember last week's study?) Such submission is called taking up the cross and following Jesus. Jesus' relationship with His cross explains how the Christian bears his cross by total submission and availability to God.

This week's study deals with “The Way of the Cross.” It follows naturally last week's study in time and logical sequence. Jesus had wrestled in prayer and gained the victory in Gethsemane. He was surrendered to the will of God. He did not draw back even though it meant the cross where He would be the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners.

Christians must follow the example of Christ. They are not to die for sinners, as He did. But they are to surrender the control of their lives to God,

as He did. The way of discipleship is the way of the cross. Christians can understand their cross-bearing when they understand Christ's cross-bearing.

## **I. CHRIST AND THE CROSS**

Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and forsaken by His disciples in Gethsemane. He was taken directly from Gethsemane to be tried and condemned to death.

The trials of Jesus were two-fold. There was a religious aspect of the trials and then a political aspect. The religious trials were three-fold. He was tried before the ex-high priest named Annas, before the acting high priest named Caiaphas and some members of the Sanhedrin before dawn, and then before Caiaphas and the full Sanhedrin after dawn. The political (civil) trials were also three-fold. He was tried before Herod where He was acquitted, before Pilate where He was acquitted, before Pilate a second time where He was condemned because of threats against Pilate if he released Him.

There were nine points in which the authorities violated the law in the trials of Jesus. (1) The private examination before Annas violated the law which said one must be tried in the presence of the accusers. (2) It was illegal to try a criminal at night as Jesus was tried the first time before Caiaphas. (3) Sentence of death was forbidden to be passed until the court had spent one night following the trial; no such time was given. (4) A criminal must not be tried on the day before a feast or the Sabbath, but Jesus was. (5) Jesus was condemned without any legal charge. (6) The court tried to force Him to testify against himself. (7) The conduct of the officers (Mark 14:65) was illegal. (8) The judges did not fast all day before pronouncing the death sentence. (9) They sought to prove Jesus' guilt while the law required them to seek to prove the accused innocent. The illegality of the trial made the cross more ominous.

Jesus' body was on the cross a little over six hours. That period can be divided logically into three periods, two of three hours each and one of an indefinite time.

The first three hours on the cross (9:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon) were marked by six significant events after Jesus was nailed to the beam and the cross was set in place. (1) The soldiers gambled for His garments — Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23, 24. (2) A superscription was placed over His head to read, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” — Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22. (3) Two criminals were executed with Him, one placed on a cross on either side of His cross — Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27. (4) The crowd standing by and the religious

leaders mocked Him — Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-39. (5) One of the condemned criminals turned to Him in repentance and asked to be remembered — Luke 23:39-43. (6) Jesus spoke three times during those three hours: “*Father forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34) was addressed to God. “*To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43) was addressed to the penitent criminal. “*Woman behold thy son . . . Behold, thy mother*” (John 19:26, 27) was addressed to Mary and to the apostle John respectively. Noon had come.

The second three hours on the cross (12:00 noon until 3:00 p.m.) witnessed several significant events. (1) Darkness came over all the land as the sun was eclipsed — Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44, 45. (2) Jesus spoke four times. “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34, 35) was cried out to the Father. “*I thirst*” (Matthew 27:48, 49; Mark 15:36; John 19:28, 29) was spoken to sympathetic friends nearby. “*It is finished*” (John 19:30) was an announcement to the whole world. “*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*” (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46) was the final surrender to God in confident faith. (3) The death of Jesus was followed by two great manifestations (besides the darkening of the sun during the crucifixion). (a) The veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom — Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45. (b) There was a great earthquake — Matthew 27:51-53. Terror seized upon the witnesses and they concluded that Jesus must have been a righteous man, the Son of God — Matthew 27:54-56; Mark 15:39-41; Luke 23:47-49.

The third period around the cross was an indefinite time between the death of Jesus and the hasty burial of His body. Soldiers came to break the bones of the crucified victims to hasten their death, but found Jesus was dead already (John 19:31-42). Joseph of Arimathea went boldly to Pilate to ask permission to take the body of Jesus from the cross and bury it. Pilate called for the centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion detail of soldiers, was assured that Jesus was dead, and released the body for burial (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-42). The burial was hasty, without proper anointing of the body as was the custom among the Jews, because the special Sabbath was beginning at 6:00 p.m.

The crucifixion of Jesus covered less than nine hours from His being nailed to the cross to His being laid in the tomb (9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.). Yet in that time, the redemption of the world was effected.

What was the purpose of the cross of Jesus? “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God*” (I Peter 3:18). “*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,*

*that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (I Peter 2:24). “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2). “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10).*

## **II. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CROSS**

Jesus said Christian discipleship is impossible apart from cross-bearing (Mark 8:34, 35). But what does it mean to take up a cross and bear it after Jesus?

The Christian's cross is not assuming an obligation in service. It is not mere self-denial. It is not some spirit-crushing burden. It is not taking all joy out of life. All those things are misunderstandings of the cross.

What is the solitary purpose of a cross? It is to die upon. The cross meant in New Testament times what the electric chair or the hangman's noose means today. To “take up a cross” means to move purposely to death.

What kind of death is involved in Christian cross-bearing? It is death to self. One reckons himself to be dead unto sin but alive unto God (Romans 6:11). He no longer yields members of his body as instruments of righteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God (Romans 6:13). He has presented his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God and not conformed to the world (Romans 12:1, 2). To him, to live is Christ, for he is resolved that Christ shall be magnified in his body (Philippians 1:20, 21). Self is put off the throne of the life and Christ reigns there instead. That is the kind of spiritual death to self which is the essence of the Christian life and the bearing of the cross.

*“And he said to them all If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23, 24).*

1. How is the cross related to one's becoming a Christian?
2. How is the cross related to one's serving as a Christian?
3. What happened the night before Jesus was crucified?
4. What were the six phases of the trial of Jesus?
5. What happened between 9:00 a.m. and noon?
6. What happened between noon and 3:00 p.m.?
7. What happened after 3:00 p.m.?

8. How does I John 2:2 explain the crucifixion?
9. How does Mark 8:34, 35 apply to you today?
10. How can you bear your cross after Jesus today”