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Taking up Your Cross

Serving God, pursuing holiness, praying, obeying God, fasting, reading your Bible, worship; these are personal practices that are deeply rooted in the tradition of the church. These tenets of faith can all be summed up into the simple words of Jesus when He said: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Luke 9:23.

All through scripture and even through the ages it is the ones who have devoted their lives to God and living with these practices which have changed the world. They came from all types of backgrounds, cultures, and colors; both men and women in the history of Christianity have seen God work through them to bring victory. From women of renown who dared to believe God to change their nation to the little momma who never gave up on her drug-addicted children until all were delivered. The power of God is available to all of us for every circumstance we might face and every obstacle we must overcome.

Unfortunately, when I look at this present generation’s preachers, for the most part, I see the body of Christ being moved further and further away from the simplicity of the Gospel. Enticed by self-serving messages I can literally see masses of Christians letting go of their responsibility of spiritual growth and following a message that will eventually limit God in their lives.

When I was a youth minister, I discovered something amazing. We had young men and women who were raised in the church, but we also had many who were recently saved from the world, some of which were the only Christians in their homes. I found that many of the kids raised in the church had developed a type of hybrid Christianity that included both serving God and participating with the world at the same time. It seemed almost impossible to get some of those youth to accept a devoted life to Christ. There was no pursuit of holiness or spiritual growth in their lives only religious practices of attending church. There was no real conviction in their hearts to lay their life down for the gospel, to sacrifice all for God.

I see this same hybrid now being accepted in many churches today. There are too many voices who preach a message which is contrary to Gospel of Christ. Their message leads to a lifestyle of self-serving with moments of offering God time and finances on the side. It's missing the most essential ingredient of all which is laying your life at the altar of God. Serving God while containing the power to hold on to your will is the definition of all religion.

I'm very concerned about this worldly thinking creeping into the very structure of the church replacing sanctification with self-gratification. Great justification is being used to create an acceptance of a weak gospel for the serving of ourselves in the pursuit of

wealth, flesh and position and is throwing away the very practices that will bring us incredible victories!

Worldliness is alluring to everyone and falsely promises fulfillment and gratification whereas taking up our cross indeed is the only possible way for us to find true fulfillment. There is one excellent example of a man in the Old Testament who attempted to be fulfilled with the works as he served God. In my mind, he is the best proof of the need for each of us to abandon ourselves into the path of the cross into our daily life and to get back to the basics of living for God.

Let's look into the life of King Solomon who was known as the wisest and wealthiest man on the planet. 1 Kings 4:29-30 says "And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt." The kings and queens of his time looked up to him and marveled at his riches and wisdom. In one of the most impactful chapters in scripture, we can hear the wisdom of an aged king on his realization from a life of abundance. If there is a person who could make an argument to live for himself, it would be this man. Please read carefully what he preaches about the life of this world.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

"1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.

2 I said of laughter--"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

3 I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

4 I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.”

He was a man who kept no boundaries and allowed his eyes and heart everything it could possibly desire. The flesh was never satisfied and never fulfilled him. He realized everything outside of living a life for God was empty and vain. Let's not live our lives in vain. We can impact this place while we are here. The heart of the gospel is for us to touch someone with our story, our testimony and our time, not to live for our own desires. Even if you've been following God and it seems difficult to walk away from the world, keep pressing in because every person will eventually come to the same conclusion as King Solomon did at the end of his life:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

“13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.

14 For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether good or evil.”

You can make it!

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