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**Take Up Your Cross**  
**Matthew 16:21-26**

<sup>21</sup> *From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* <sup>22</sup> *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."* <sup>23</sup> *But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

**The Cross and Self-Denial**

<sup>24</sup> *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.* <sup>25</sup> *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* <sup>26</sup> *For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?*

Jesus starts this new teaching about suffering at **a strange time in his life**. He has asked his disciples earlier, **who do you say I am**, and Peter confidently identifies Jesus as the Messiah. After that, Jesus says yes, and *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! you are Peter,<sup>[d]</sup> and on this rock<sup>[e]</sup> I will build my church!*

So Peter is **riding high** on his identification of Jesus, and Jesus' affirmation of him as a rock for future followers.

Then this passage starts with the words, **'from that time on...'**,

In other words, this is a **new teaching**.

And it's not for the faint of heart.

Jesus tells them that *he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*

Peter can hardly stand it.  
It makes *no sense* to him.  
And can you blame him?

Jesus is the Messiah, the one to save and redeem Israel,  
The one who will rise up against all who oppress God's people—right?

So Peter boldly tells Jesus,  
*"God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."*<sup>23</sup>  
That's when Jesus turns and says to Peter,  
*"Get behind me, Satan! You are a **stumbling block** to me;*

Wait a minute--why is *Jesus being so harsh* to the guy he just praised?  
He explains it to Peter--  
*"you are setting your mind not on divine things but on **human things.**"*

### ***What does Jesus mean?***

How are we supposed to set our minds on divine things, not human?  
And what does this have to do with the *suffering* that He predicts—  
for himself, and his followers?

First, we might ask ourselves--*How do we see Jesus,*  
and what does He mean for our faith today?  
Do we see Jesus as the *perfect person*, the one we are supposed to imitate?  
Do we see him as *a conqueror* of all that is not of God?  
That seems to be Peter's view, at least in this conversation.

Or do we see Jesus as *the Savior of a real, messy world,*  
and a group of sinful human beings?  
Do we see him as he was, God in the flesh?  
A lowly Galilean, born in a manger, willing to eat with sinners,  
break Sabbath laws, touch the unclean, and eventually die on a cross?

Those are *different images of Jesus.*

One is powerful and triumphant in the way we usually see that,  
the other is real, and down to earth,  
and not exactly what we expect from leaders!

I read an article by Kevin DeYoung, called *Who Do You Say That I Am?* about the different types of Jesus that people see—Here's some of what he says: There's **Republican Jesus** who is against tax increases and activists judges, and for family values and owning firearms.

There's **Democrat Jesus** who is against Wall Street and Walmart, and for reducing our carbon footprint and spending other people's money.

There's **Therapist Jesus** who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

There's **Starbucks Jesus** who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid and goes to film festivals.

There's **Open-minded Jesus** who loves everyone all the time no matter what, except for people who are not as open-minded as you.

There's **Touchdown Jesus** who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

There's **Gentle Jesus** who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash and looks German.

There's **Yuppie Jesus** who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

There's **Revolutionary Jesus** who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and dream up impossible utopian schemes.

There's **Guru Jesus**, a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center.

There's **Good Example Jesus** who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

*And then there's Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Not just another prophet. Not just another Rabbi. Not just another wonder-worker.*

*He was the one they had been waiting for:*

*...not a reflection of the current mood or the projection of our own desires.*

*He is our Lord and God...more loving, more holy, and more wonderfully terrifying than we ever thought possible.*

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/who-do-you-say-i-am>

That really makes you think, doesn't it?

***Have we made Jesus into our own image*** of who we want him to be?

Or can we see Him as he was, and is, and always will be?

Making Jesus into our image is easier,  
but we are called to a ***road less traveled***—  
The road of ***actually following*** Jesus.

Which is not easy.

The path that Jesus lays out for himself, and his followers, is ***challenging***.

Jesus says:

*"If any want to become my followers, let them **deny themselves** and **take up their cross** and follow me.*

*<sup>25</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

In other words, it's not just Jesus who is going to suffer as the Messiah, ***Suffering awaits his followers as well.***

But it is a ***particular kind*** of suffering---

The kind that happens ***because we deny*** ourselves,  
take up a cross and follow Jesus.

So what does it even mean—***to take up a cross?***

Today, the cross of Jesus has ***lost its shock value.***

Jesus was saying that people who want to follow him need to pick up a cross—  
Which was the ***symbol of a horrific death***,  
the ***capital punishment*** of the Romans,  
meant to ***torture*** those who were crucified.

It would be kind of like Jesus saying today,  
we need to ***pick up our electric chair***, and carry that!

Today, we hear the word ***CROSS***, and  
***What do we think of?***

We often think of a kind of ***decoration***,  
For ***your neck***, or your ***home***,  
not a mode of capital punishment and torture, right?

So is Jesus saying that Christian faith is ***a recipe for suffering?***

I read something interesting this week in the Connections commentary.  
It asked—are we following ***a suffering Savior***,  
or ***a Savior who suffers?***

Think about this for a minute.

***A suffering Savior*** suffers for any number of reasons.  
But ***a Savior who suffers***, suffers as a result of following God's call.

You know the old saying, ***'This is just my cross to bear'?***

Have you heard people say that?

What do people usually mean?

They usually mean this is just the suffering I have to deal with in life.

It's my suffering---I can't get out of it.

***But is that what Jesus is talking about?***

OR is he saying that the cross we are called to bear  
Comes from following Him?

***We are NOT called to suffer just for suffering's sake.***

Suffering itself is not good.

It's not God's will for us to be in pain.

But—following Jesus means some self-sacrifice, self-denial,  
taking the road less traveled....and that CAN bring suffering.

See the difference?

And I think it's important to know that **Jesus is not saying**  
 'your life will be bad if you follow me'.  
 He is also not saying, 'life is bad, just deal with it'.

He is saying that life **following Him is not always easy**.  
 And we will have times of suffering...  
 but for a **reason**, with a **purpose**.  
 And that purpose is following Jesus Christ.

Notice that he says---**those who lose their life for my sake will find it!**  
 In other words—**following Jesus may be hard, but it's worth it!**  
 It brings **meaning, purpose, and joy** to our lives!

Jesus **doesn't want people to just suffer**.  
 He doesn't want us in abusive relationships,  
 Or destructive situations!

He wants us to **hang in there when the going gets tough,**  
*because we are Christians*.  
 Because we are called to do what is good, and right.

**When Peter rebuked Jesus,**  
**He saw salvation**, FROM oppression and pain and suffering.  
 And Jesus did come to bring salvation,  
 but on this side of heaven there is still pain and suffering.

We live in the **already and not yet** time—  
 Jesus has already come to usher in the kingdom of God,  
 And bring us abundant life, meaningful life, a life of joy and purpose.  
 But we are not yet perfect until heaven, and the world is still a mess!

So as we think about what it **means to take up our cross and follow Jesus,**  
 Let us think about **what cross** Jesus is asking us to take up—  
 Are you being asked to **stand up** for something or someone?  
 Is there someone who **needs** you?  
 Is there a **decision** you need to make?

And when you do those things, is there a chance that you might come up against some **opposition**?

That you ***might suffer*** in some way?

Chances are, you will.

But hear the ***Good News of the Gospel***:

We are all called to take up OUR cross and follow Jesus.

Which won't be easy—we will face some suffering.

But we will also ***discover life***, for in losing our lives, we will actually find them—

Lives of meaning, joy, and purpose.

I think we can all agree that's worth it.

And for this Good News, all God's people say, Amen