

## THE UNCLAIMED CROSS

By

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In Mark's gospel, chapter 8:34, we read: "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."

### AN OBJECTION REMOVED

The Lord Jesus Christ here addresses both the saved and the unsaved. We know this because the text says "And when he had called *the people unto him with his disciples also . . .*" I emphasize this at the outset because there are those who do not believe the gospel is to be preached unto the lost. They think it wrong to speak to the lost and tell them to "Look unto Him." In their minds it is absurd to call upon those dead in trespasses and sins to turn unto the Lord. They cannot bring themselves to exhort sinners to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

This is the house they have built.

But a few Bible examples will blow away such straw!

Look at the ministries of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself as well as Paul. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness, and what do you think? Did he preach only to the saved? Did he have one message for them and another for the lost? According to the Divine Record he preached Repent! For the kingdom of Heaven has drawn near. (*LITV*). The subject is understood *you* whoever you are, *repent!*

The Lord Jesus Christ opened His ministry in a way that these men will not imitate. AFrom that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.≡ (Mt. 4:17).

Paul preached strange doctrine at Athens, according to these men, for he proclaimed AThat they [men] should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are his offspring . . . And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent... (Acts 17:27-30). Please read the whole

passage. Paul would have been called on the carpet by the Strict Baptists, by the Primitive Baptists, and by many Sovereign Grace Baptists for so addressing these lost people!

Again at Lystra Barnabas and Paul used language which is taboo among some. They will not address the lost in the manner these apostles did, but they hang the title of *heretic* or *Arminian* on any who do. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein . . . (Acts 14:15).

Peter in speaking to Simon denounces him as a lost man: Yet Peter said unto him, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” Of course those who decry duty repentance simply have no message for such a person. But Peter, taught by the Lord as he was, had no problem. He instantly commands Simon: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:20-24).

Once again Paul verified that his whole ministry to all classes of men had been: Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21). This simply means that it is the responsibility of every one to have repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus I contend that our Lord here in this passage in Mark 8 is giving out a gospel invitation to the lost: *Deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Me!*

### WHAT IS THIS CROSS?

The cross of the text is a total surrender of your heart to the will of Christ. In other places in the Scripture this is referred to as believing with all the heart. (Acts 8:37). It is looking unto Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith. It is loving Him with the whole heart and soul. The taking up the cross is the effect of regeneration or the new birth. When one takes up the cross he is a new creation. Old things pass away and all things become new. It is a turning of the soul to God in Christ. He who takes up the cross asks as did Paul Lord what wilt thou have me to do? Thus when anyone takes up the cross of Christ, he bores his ear to the gate of King Immanuel. He says from the bottom of his heart I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

Therefore we must never take anything like suffering, lack of health, a peculiar burden, an accident, a disability, or the loss of a loved one and say *this is my cross*. And why is this true? Because we know that no unsaved person has ever taken the cross but they do have these things. The only one who has the cross, of which Christ speaks here, is the child of God.

Surely you have thought of this cross. Your heart has felt the urgency of it times without number. In those little soul-meetings which no one else knows about, you have had to repress these feelings. There are also the testimonies of family, friends, faithful pastors, quaint happenings,

unexpected events, as well as danger, sickness, and the death of loved ones and friends all of these heralding before you one clear and unforgettable message, which you shall never be able to forget, **Take up your cross and follow the Savior!**

Now when you hear the gospel of Christ out of the mouth of a faithful minister, you do consider the cross. You wonder just how you would carry it. You think of all the things that would be changed in your life. You consider the call of Christ.

But despite all of these things you somehow manage to harden your heart so that you swallow hard and pass by the cross. Finally, you walk away, without the cross. You quickly put the world in its place. There you go unblessed, unsaved. There you go without Christ and without hope. There you go without claiming the cross!

Why is this?

May I submit two reasons as to why the cross is unclaimed? The cross is unclaimed first, because of *what the sinner is*. Secondly, the cross is unclaimed because of *what the cross is*.

## I. THE CROSS IS UNCLAIMED BECAUSE OF WHAT THE SINNER IS

There is nothing wrong with the gospel. It is not because men are not invited to come to Christ that they do not come. It is not because of the doctrine of election or predestination that men do not come to Christ. It is not because the atonement is particular which keeps men from coming to Christ. Men do not come to Christ because they are sinners! (Rom. 3:23).

Sin is not an idle or incidental thing with men but a fixed habit which is in them like poison is in the rattlesnake. It is as much a part of his nature as breathing. Men live in sin. They like sin, and they lap up sin. They have sin in them, on them, over them, around them, under them and through them. They are sin-saturated. Prick the sinner anywhere and he will ooze sin.

Sin prevents the soul from coming to Christ. No man comes to Christ until he is willing to put down sin. Sin is like a mountain between the soul and Christ. The Jews who slew the Lord Jesus Christ could never come to Christ until they saw their sin. Therefore, Peter charged them with the death of Christ on the day of Pentecost: You have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. (Acts 2:23b).

Sin keeps men out of the kingdom of God. Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, wild parties, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (LITV).

Sin enslaves men, (Rom. 6:16), darkens men, and puts them in subjection to the Devil (Acts 26:18). Because of the power of sin men, will not come to Christ. They refuse Him and reject the cross.

Men are taken captive by the Devil at his will (2 Tim. 2:26). For those who vaunt the free will of man, this text is a nightmare for it teaches Satan has power to snare men when he wills to do so. And because of sin and the power of Satan over the lost, they cannot come to Christ, they cannot take up the cross. (Jn. 6:65). But if they did, they would be saved! Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, **lest they should believe and be saved.** (Lk. 8:12). The emphasis is added because many sovereign grace Baptists have never seen this clause.

Men are dead in trespasses and sins, (Eph. 2:1, 5). And we must never minimize this death. Yet, many preachers have utterly failed to grasp the meaning of this death because they reason that as a Dead man cannot respond to anything therefore we cannot exhort sinners to repent and to believe on Christ.

This is a fundamental error!

This is a failure to recognize the simple truths of Scripture.

True it is that man is dead in sin and trespasses. *But it is a great error to equate this death with physical death.* The man who is physically dead is responsible for nothing! No man goes to the cemetery to collect a bill. The IRS directs no mail to the morgue. The court proceedings, against a man, for whatever charges, are dropped the moment the death certificate is received. But he who is *dead* spiritually is very much *alive!* Dead in sins and trespasses means that the *sinner lives in and for these very things.* And just because the sinner is alive to sin, he is responsible for his sin!

Read carefully this inspired statement: And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; now mark what these quickened souls did while they were in this death of which he speaks:

In which you then walked according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience, among whom we also all conducted ourselves formerly in the lusts of our flesh, doing the things willed of the flesh and of the understandings, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest. (LITV Eph. 2:2-3). They were walking or *living.* The Devil was *working* in them. They were *disobedient.* They *conducted* themselves in the lusts of the flesh and they were *doing* the things the flesh *willed.* All of these things are the activities of one who is under the power of spiritual death!

Therefore the man who is spiritually dead is alive to sin, alive to every kind of evil action, alive to the lusts of the Devil on the one hand and very much opposed to every spiritual activity on the other. This man is altogether responsible to God! He is responsible to His Law! He is responsible to repent and to believe the gospel of God! Let no one make the mistake of thinking that because a man is dead in sins that he is dead to responsibility! Men are responsible to God.† Therefore,

the Lord says: Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Sinners are to be exhorted to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men are selfish. This means that men want what they want. If God blesses them with worldly goods, they do not thank Him, they just build bigger barns. If He does not bless them, they curse Him. They want to rule their own lives and they say of the Lord, We will not have this man to rule over us. (Lk 19:14).

Men are fully equipped with all the *faculties* to worship God but they have no desire to worship Him in truth, (Jn. 4:23). Because of the fallen nature, men do not come to Him in spirit and in truth. The parts are all there, but they are smashed by sin, like a watch left on a railroad track.

Men cannot do well, cannot please God and consequently, every time he looks at the cross he turns away! The cross is unclaimed because of what men are.

## II. THE CROSS IS UNCLAIMED BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS

Taking the cross is much, much more than most of us have been led to believe. Easy believism, decisional regeneration, and the invitational ritual have so distorted the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ that multitudes have a name to live but are dead! Salvation is not an easy thing. The cross is unclaimed because it is so difficult! In fact, taking the cross, is impossible with men! But praise the name of the Lord, all things are possible with Him.

Taking the cross is much more than a belief in God. It is not enough for you to nod your head at the right places, or to say I believe when certain creeds are read in your hearing. You may know well the major doctrines of the Bible. You may understand the concept of the kingdom and the church. You may be able to give a good explanation of the doctrines of repentance and baptism, the resurrection and the Lord's Supper and yet know nothing about this cross of salvation. All of this knowledge, and more, exists where the cross is unclaimed and unclaimable.

The devils are compelled to admit the truth about the Lord for they knew him, (Mk 1:34). That is, they knew who He was. They knew about His power. They knew He was the Savior. Yea, beyond all this, they believed and their belief affected them to such a degree that they *trembled* in the Lord's presence! (James 2:19). Beware then of settling upon what you know and counting this as the cross-taking of which Jesus speaks.

Taking the cross means that it is imperative that we recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:5). Thomas recognized this when he saw the wounds in the body of Christ . . . And said to Him, My Lord and my God! <sup>2</sup>

This cross-grasping is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ to the salvation of the soul with a God-given faith, a repenting never to be repented of. Repentance and faith are permeated with godly sorrow, which sorrow is packed with useful tools like a Swiss army knife, ( II Cor. 7:9-11).

Taking up the cross represents submission, sacrifice and self-repudiation. Taking up the cross means we put Christ in first place in our lives. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? (Acts 9:6). The greatest idol of the unrenewed heart is self. This Dagon must go down before the Savior. Then we must also put all those nearest and dearest to us beneath the Savior. If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Lk 14:26-27). A Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (vs. 34). Whence this easy discipleship ?

Taking up the cross is to walk by faith. It is not merely knowing who holds tomorrow, but it is trusting Him who holds time in all tenses, past, present as well as future. The cross is diametrically opposed to walking by sight. The closer men get to the cross the more they realize that it is an impossible thing for them. No man can take up the cross without looking unto Jesus and this looking can only be by faith which is given in effectual calling.

Taking up the cross requires an appetite for God in the heart. <sup>3</sup> If there is one thing in the world which makes the cross repulsive to the unrenewed man it is this hungering and thirsting for God. The natural man hates this idea. It is as repugnant to him as it would be to eat carrion with vultures. He may give God a little notice something like Hymn time on the local country-music station. But there is no appetite for God! There is no desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. When the natural man thinks of God, rather than a hunger for Him, there is that over-full feeling one has just before regurgitating.

Taking up the cross is as Warfield says: ...Is nothing less than an authentic miracle of divine grace; always and everywhere in the strictest sense impossible with man, and possible only with God, with whom all things are possible. <sup>4</sup>

Taking up the cross is receiving salvation God's way, all of grace. But man is an enemy to salvation of unalloyed grace. As Gill says: ...They disliked the cross of Christ; they were unwilling to take it up for his sake and follow him; they studied all ways and means to shun it; they ingratiated themselves into the affections of the unbelieving Jews, by complying with the ceremonies of the law as necessary to salvation . . . (Phil. 3:18). Every person, every society and every doctrine which puts deeds done by man in the place of taking up the cross preach a gospel double cursed, (Gal. 1:7-8).

Taking up the cross is not what you have or what you do, but finding you are empty of holiness, void of every grace, and bankrupt of all righteousness, and at the same time seeing Christ Jesus the Lord with all the riches of His glorious grace and cashing in on Him. A giving up on self and a full trust in Christ is essential for salvation and glorification. It was this concept there can be no contribution of man to his salvation which sent the rich young ruler recoiling from the cross, and reeling from Christ, as did those who came to take Him in the garden. This young man clung to the lukewarm mammon of earth but the gold of Heaven was too hot to hold. The cross was far too heavy for him and he staggered at the thought of bearing it. He could revel in an abstract Christ or a pictorial cross, but the Christ of reality and the cross of revelation drove him away. While he could not gain Heaven, the cost of the cross being too high, he bought Hell at a bargain.

Thus men do not take up the cross because of what this cross involves--self denial! They are too busy for the banquet of God's own Son, (Lk. 14:19). They refuse to look unto Jesus, (Jn. 3:14; Isa. 45:22); they refuse to go to Him that they might have life, (Jn. 5:40); nor will they strive to enter in, (Lk. 13:24). They will not receive the kingdom as a little child, (Mk. 10:15); and the lusts of other things choke the word. They will not repent and believe the gospel, (Mk. 4:19; 1:15), because they find the cost too high, (Lk. 14:25-33). They do as the Jews in Antioch did. They judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, (Acts 13:46).

Now in the light of all of this, with His own voice, Christ called upon sinners to take up the cross and follow Him! This is the message which He gave us in His Word. Here is the authority of Heaven! Here is the only commission ever given to His churches. Here is responsibility for every sinner who hears these words. This command<sup>s</sup> is as much the responsibility of every sinner as is the command Thou shalt not kill! And when any sinner responds to this command of the Savior, the Lord Himself will receive him with open arms.

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sin: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses, (Acts 13:38,39).

This is that gospel which we must preach to all nations, if we would preach what Christ taught us to preach. This is what the apostles preached. This is what the early church preached. This is what the great men of God in all ages have preached. Let us boldly proclaim to every sinner: *Take up your cross and follow the Savior!*

But perhaps you are like a dead bird. You cannot fly. You have no power, no ability and you are driven down to the earth because of it. You have no faith, no repentance. You find the cross too heavy. You see the cross as an impossible thing. Salvation is beyond you. This is where all men are without Christ Jesus the Lord. But Christ has everything you need. He is everything. Come to Him. He will give you rest. He will enable you to see the cross altogether differently than you did before:

From an Unbearable burden to an ultra- light crown

From an impossible restraint to immeasurable freedom

From a horrible instrument to an honorable insignia

From an unthinkable alternative to the ultimate choice.

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent treatment of the responsibility of man cf. Pink's *Gleaning From The Scriptures*, chap. 20, entitled *Problem*. p. 265- 280. See also *By His Grace and for His Glory*, by Thomas J. Nettles, pp.385-391. Nettles is an able SBC author and he vigorously defends the doctrines of grace and biblical evangelism while opposing the prevailing methods of our day.

[2](#) LITV. This quote is given from Jay Green's excellent translation because it has the exclamation point. The KJV translators were stingy with this mark. If this sentence does not call for the exclamation point, then I can't think of a sentence in the Bible which does.

[3](#) Jn 6:53, 54. Cf. *Future Grace* by John Piper, p. 86.

[4](#) *The Person and Work of Christ*, B. Warfield, p.153.

[5](#) Let him *take* the cross...≡ is aorist imperative.