

Technology is constantly trying to make our lives easier. Just look at the features which new cars are developing — even if they cannot drive themselves quite yet, they alert to lane drift, they watch your eyes to detect if you are getting drowsy, automatic braking, and the list goes on. Many of these new things we probably feel that we can get along very nicely without, but once we get used to them, it is hard to imagine living without them. I can remember when I first got a car that had automatic door locks on it. At the time I thought I really would not need a feature like that. Now it has become a feature that truly has made my life easier, and I would not want to give it up. As we seek to make our lives easier, with less hardships, it becomes harder and harder for us to imagine going back to doing things the old way. Why would we even want to bother doing it the old, more difficult way if there is an easier, quicker way of doing something?

And yet there are certain things that are impossible to attain without a lot of effort and sweat. If we want to lose weight and strengthen our bodies, there is no pill or easy diet that will accomplish this for us. It will require will-power and exercise. Learning a new skill has a learning curve — it does not come automatically, but takes time, effort and practice. There are certain things that are precious to us that are worth all of the extra time and effort which they require. That is exactly what Jesus was stressing to His disciples in the Word of God which is before us this morning. To be a disciple of Jesus is one of those things that will require time and effort on our part — but the reward is worth it. That is why Jesus encourages each one of us to **TAKE UP OUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS**. What this means is that we are to have in mind the things of God, and therefore, we will not be ashamed of Jesus in our lives.

Taking up a cross is something which Jesus knows all about. Even while He was still going around preaching and teaching, Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He was going to have to suffer many things, be rejected by the leaders of the people, and finally be killed. Jesus knew that this was the reason that He had come to this earth — to lay down His life as a ransom for many. This was not something which He was looking forward to doing, as we can tell from the agony which He went through praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. But it was something He was willing to do for us, even as He prayed, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

When Peter heard Jesus speaking about His coming suffering and death, He took Jesus aside to tell Him not to talk that way. Peter did not understand what God had sent Jesus into this world to accomplish for fallen mankind. He thought he knew better than Jesus what might be best for Jesus. Jesus rebuked Peter with some harsh words, “**Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**” (33) Peter was advocating that Jesus take the easy way out, that He not lay down His life through His suffering and death — as though that would be the best for everyone involved. That was much the same temptation that Satan himself used against Jesus in the wilderness.

Jesus knew what it would entail to be the Savior of all mankind. He knew the tremendous cost, the sacrifice which it would take. You and I are being reminded of His great sacrifice during our mid-week worship services, in which we are hearing again the passion history as compiled from the four gospels. We are being reminded of all that Jesus had to go through to be our Savior. Jesus willingly took up His cross because He had in mind the same things which God did. He wanted us to spend eternity with Him in heaven, and this was the only way that this would ever happen.

Now Jesus speaks to each one of us and asks us to take up our cross and follow Him. Taking up our cross is not going to be easy for us, even as it was not easy for Jesus. Jesus stated it this way: “**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**” (34) We begin denying ourselves by recognizing that we are so corrupted by our sinful nature that we cannot do anything that would be pleasing to our heavenly Father. You might ask, if we are so sinful that we do not even realize we are sinning, should we even bother trying to stop those sins? The answer obviously would be, “YES!” We are to deny ourselves — those innate sinful desires, admitting that we are so corrupted that

we can do nothing to help ourselves. Only then will we be willing to listen to what Jesus has already accomplished for us.

Jesus asks this question: **“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”**

(36) Most of our sinful desires revolve around gaining an advantage in this world — whether pleasure or things. We can think we are so great and wise and powerful in this world that we believe we can handle anything that may come our way. But if we try to handle our sins by ourselves, we will fall far short of the perfection which God demands of us, and we will end up in hell. Deny yourself, that is, recognize your sinfulness and recognize the need you have for your Savior to wash away all of your sins. Then go to Him, humbly confessing your sins, and you will receive full and complete forgiveness because our Savior has already taken up His cross for us, and gave His body and blood to wash away all of our sins.

Then, after we have taken up our cross to follow Jesus, we will not be ashamed of Jesus in our lives. We will have in mind the things of God in everything that we do and say in our lives. We will strive to live as His holy children in this life. Again, that will not be easy to do. We are surrounded by sin so much in this world that it is impossible for us to get away from it. But that does not mean that we are going to indulge in actions which we know are sinful. The television set which sits in our home is a prime example of how we are often ashamed to let our faith in Jesus shine forth. When shows that are truly sinful — such as those which promote homosexuality, or those that glorify sex outside of marriage, and a multitude of other sins — are we willing to allow our love for Jesus shine forth in our lives so much that we would be willing to switch stations or to turn off the set? Or do we just sit and watch and grumble that there is nothing good that is on?

To be ashamed of Jesus also means to act in public as though Jesus was not an important part of your life. If people do not automatically pick up from your words, actions, and attitudes that you have taken up your cross and are following Jesus, then you are not letting your light of faith shine very brightly, which means that you are ashamed of Jesus and what He asks of you in your life.

There are going to be times when our conviction of faith is going to directly affect the way we speak, act, and live our lives in this world. It may not be the most convenient thing in this world, but if it is important to us, we will put it into practice. If we are going to talk the talk, then we better be willing to walk the walk by putting that faith into action in our lives. That means that we will be willing to be laughed at for standing up for the truth of God’s word in such areas as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and so on.

Technology may save us from many chores that were inconvenient and time consuming. But we will still want to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We will probably never be asked to give up our lives because of Jesus, but there are many other things that are a part of this life which we will gladly endure because that is what God wants for us in this life, and because we are not ashamed of letting Jesus be an important part of our day to day lives in this world. May each one of us be willing to take up our cross and follow Jesus.