

## Lessons from the Cross – Matthew 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34

**Introduction:** Have you ever tried to communicate with someone and found it difficult? Some time back, I called upon a preacher to come and preach for me. I ask him up front, *“Brother, I want to ask you to preach this special meeting for me.”*

He replied, *“What kind of meeting is it?”*

I said, *“We’re having a joint service with several other churches. We’ll have some good singing and some special prayers by other pastors, and then you’ll preach and then we’ll have a time of fellowship with refreshments and such.”*

He said, *“Oh great, a fellowship meal. We’ve got a bunch of ladies who like to cook. They’ll be tickled to death. I’ll get my ladies right on it. Is that all you’re going to do?”*

I said, *“Well, no. The refreshments are after the service.”*

*“Oh, what kind of service? Is it going to be like a singing or something?”* he asked.

I said, *“Well, there will be singing, but there’ll also be some special prayers given by some other pastors.”*

*“Oh, a testimony meeting!”* He said, *“Those are always great. Is someone going to preach?”*

*“Well. Yes,”* I said, *“That’s what I called you about. I want you to preach.”* He said, *“Well why didn’t you say so!”*

Communication can be quite a challenge sometimes. That is why the Bible can be hard to understand at times, but not this passage. Here Jesus speaks very plainly. He doesn’t use parabolic, hyperbolic, apocalyptic or poetic language here. **Matthew 20:17-19 (NIV)** says, <sup>17</sup> *Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them,* <sup>18</sup> *“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death<sup>19</sup> and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”* Can you get any clearer than that?

Luke 18:34 adds one more bit of information. It says, *“The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.”*

Now, even before His birth, Jesus was headed to the cross. Rev 13:8 says the Lamb of God was *“slain from*

*the foundation of the world.*” And after His birth, every step He took was toward the cross. And as we see in this passage, we have been invited not just to admire Jesus, but to follow Him. When we decide to follow Jesus, we are following Him to the cross. As shocking and mind-boggling as that thought is, it behooves us to learn some things about this cross we’re headed toward. This morning, I want to point out some things we need to know about the cross of Jesus. First:

## **1. The Cross Was Predicted by the Prophets**

In Luke’s account of this conversation between Jesus and His disciples, in 18:31, Jesus said, *“Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.”* Did you know that there are over 300 prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament? Many of them predict the details of His death. And although they were written hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, He fulfilled each of them. Here are just a few:

**Psalm 41:9 (NIV)** says that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend: *“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* We know that one of Jesus’ disciples, Judas, betrayed Jesus.

**Zechariah 11:12 (NIV)** tells us that Jesus would be sold for thirty pieces of silver: *“If you think it best, give me my pay...So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.”*

**Isaiah 53:7 (NIV)** says: *“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* We know that as Jesus was being accused, He remained silent when He was given a chance to defend Himself.

**Isaiah 50:6 (NIV)** says, *“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”* And **Psalm 22:7-8 (NIV)** says, *“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him!’ ”* We know that all this happened at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

**Psalm 22:16 (NIV)** says, *“A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.”* When David wrote this, crucifixion hadn’t even been invented as a mode of execution.

**Psalm 34:20 (NIV)** predicts, *“He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”* The Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves on either side, but when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, so

they didn't break His legs.

**Isaiah 53:9 (NIV)** says, "*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.*" We know that Jesus died between two thieves, and that a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea, laid Jesus in his own, new, expensive tomb.

**Psalms 16:10 (NIV)** says, "...*you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*" Thank God that Jesus came out of the grave, and He is alive today!

Someone has calculated the odds of *one* man in history fulfilling just *eight* of these prophecies as 1 in 10<sup>17</sup>. (A 1 with 17 zeroes.) But Jesus didn't just fulfill 8 prophecies; He fulfilled over 300! The next thing we need to know about the cross is:

## **2. The Cross is a Place of Pain and Suffering**

In the first part of verse 19 Jesus told His disciples that when they arrived in Jerusalem He would be turned "*over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.*"

Now the disciples, for the most part, were among the Jews who were looking for a Messiah who would be a great King like David or Solomon. They were thinking that this King would come and lead a rebellion against the Roman Empire and set them free. Somehow they missed Isaiah's prediction in Isaiah 53:3-5 that the Messiah would be a suffering servant – that He would be, "...*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*" They misunderstood that it would be Jesus who would be "...*pierced for our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities;*" and that "*the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*"

But Jesus didn't miss it. In fact, He understood it completely., The Bible tells us as a boy that Jesus was aware He had to be about His father's business—redeeming mankind of sin. And I'm sure that as He walked the roads of Judea in and around Jerusalem, He saw the common sight of criminals who had been nailed to trees along the road. And Jesus understood that the only way sin could be forgiven was through a blood sacrifice, and He had to become that sacrifice for the sins of the world.

He understood it even though His earthly ministry was comprised of astounding teaching, amazing miracles and improbable healings. But Jesus knew He didn't come to heal, teach, or to do miracles. He came to suffer

and to die.

As Jesus continued down the road to the cross, as unpleasant as He knew it would be, He kept going - determined to finish the course and determined to face the rejection – the mocking – the agonizing and intense pain and suffering. He saw it all—and He kept on walking toward the Cross.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the pain and suffering of the Cross. Bonhoeffer was a German Pastor who spent the last few years of his life in a German Concentration Camp. Shortly before he was executed he said, *“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”* Next, we need to understand that:

### **3. The Cross Produced the Resurrection**

God has a way of turning bad into good. When Joseph comforted his evil brothers after their father, Jacob’s death, he said, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (**Gen. 50:20 NIV**). When the Israelites were facing certain defeat at the hands of the Philistines, God sent a little shepherd boy named David to defeat them. And here, in vs. 19 Jesus says that He would be turned *“over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.”* But *“On the third day he will be raised to life!”*

Without the resurrection, the life of Jesus, His Virgin Birth; His powerful teaching; His amazing miracles; and His death on the cross would have little meaning. Only in His resurrection was Jesus able to verify everything He did and said. Had there been no resurrection, Jesus would have been just a religious teacher like Buddha, Mohammed, or Confucius.

Of all the ancient religions, Jesus is the only founder who is still alive. You can visit their graves and honor their remains, but if you could go to Jesus’ tomb, there will be no corpse there. They are all dead, and Jesus was once dead, but now He’s alive! No one else can make that claim.

The resurrection of Jesus is so important that Romans 10:9 says you **must** believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead if you are going to be saved. It’s not enough to just believe that Jesus was a great

man, or that He founded a religion. If you don't accept the fact that Jesus was resurrected, you can't be saved. And what we have to remember is that Jesus claimed He would come back from the dead. If He wasn't able to pull that off, He'd be a liar, and couldn't be trusted, because He would have been a fake. Finally, here's the practical aspect of the Cross.

#### **4. The Cross is the Pattern for Every Disciple**

As I said earlier, Luke tells that the disciples didn't understand any of this. That's the theme throughout the gospel—these guys weren't the sharpest knives in the drawer! Even on the day Jesus ascended back into heaven, the disciples were still clueless. You'd think that after following Jesus for three years, listening to His teaching, seeing the miracles, experiencing His death on the cross, seeing the empty tomb, and watching Him pass through locked doors and making fish appear out of nowhere, that they'd finally get it. But look at what they said to Jesus just before He was taken up into Heaven: Did they say, “*OK Lord, we get it. You can count on us to spread your message.*” No! The last thing the disciples said to Jesus was, “*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?*” (**Acts 1:6 NIV**). After all He had shown them, they were still looking for an earthly kingdom!

Now if the original disciples had a hard time learning what being a disciple was all about, there's hope for me. There's still a lot about being a disciple I don't understand! There's still a lot about the cross I don't understand. But I am learning this: The cross was not just a tragic event of the past. It's a present reality for every disciple. I'm not talking about wearing a cross necklace or lapel pin, or having a crocheted cross bookmark in your Bible. I'm talking about following Jesus' pattern.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus invites every disciple to walk the road to the cross. He said, “*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*” (**Luke 9:23 NIV**). And the Apostle Paul learned to understand what that means because he said, “*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*” (**Galatians 2:20 NIV**).

Being a follower of Christ means it's not about me. It means that I don't deserve the attention. I have nothing to boast of. The only thing I have to boast about is “*in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (**Gal. 6:14 NIV**).

**Conclusion:** Adrian Rogers used to tell about a note that was supposedly found in an African preacher home. The note was one man's declaration as a disciple of Christ. The note read, *"I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The dye has been cast. I have stepped over the line, the decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees...tamed visions, worldly talking, and cheap giving.... My face is set, my gate is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up for the cause of Jesus Christ. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till everyone knows, work till He stops me...."*

Sounds like a man who learned the lessons of the cross to me. The cross was predicted by the prophets. It was a place of intense pain and suffering. But it produced the resurrection of Christ. The question is: Have you learned the lesson of the Cross? Are you going forward with Christ or standing still in mediocrity? Are you a follower or an admirer of Christ? An admirer stands at a distance and wishes they could be like the object of their admiration. A follower learns and trusts and obeys. Will you be a follower of Christ?