

# What is Jesus Doing?

## CARRYING YOUR CROSS

*Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."*

- Luke 9:23-24

Wikipedia says "Self-denial is an act of letting go of the self as with altruistic abstinence; the willingness to forgo personal pleasures or undergo personal trials in the pursuit of the increased good of another. Various religions and cultures take differing views of self-denial, some considering it a positive trait and others considering it a negative one. According to some Protestants, self-denial is considered a superhuman virtue only obtainable through Jesus."

The Protestants to whom this description refers are Calvinists, presumably. John Calvin's view of self-denial is almost completely centered on the list of "don'ts" that are associated with asceticism, as opposed to altruism (the Golden Rule). Calvin was also most well-known for the odious doctrine of "double-predestination" causing millions of modern Christians as well as many of those since the 16th Century to believe that God predestined all people he created, some for Heaven and some for Hell (none knowing for sure who is who). Even Calvin stated that this decree by God was "horrible" (and yet he believed in it enough to put it into doctrine and burn others at the stake for disputing it!).

Conversely, I maintain that the self-denial that Jesus taught was denial of self for the purposes of putting others ABOVE yourself and spending your thoughts in prayer for others, and spending your time and your money pursuing the betterment of others (and of course living out a true Christ-like example so that those that know you can see Jesus in you and come to faith).

Let us look at the picture that is painted when we put these whole-thought scriptures beside one another.

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*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

- Philippians 2:1-4

Jesus said to him, *“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- Matthew 22:37-40

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

- 1 John 4:7-8

God, Whom John says “is Love”, desires that we love Him and love each other. Therefore, I assert that the “self-denial” that Jesus taught is the laying down of one’s life for:

1. The Glory of God (His Will, not mine be done), and
2. The benefit and betterment of those God has placed around you.

That said, as I have revealed in previous blogs, I believe that being/becoming “the called” is a whole life event and that God knows who belong to Him at the end from the beginning because He is transcendent (in all time and space at once) AS WELL AS imminent (with us in real time through His Spirit). Because this is true, those who are the called are set apart even before they say YES to Jesus in this time and place we call life on earth.

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For that reason, God is gracious and merciful to them and they are capable of great acts of love although not yet regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit that happens at the moment of their heartfelt confession of faith in Him.

Think on this symbol of the horizontal piece of the Cross as Jesus' and our love for each other, and the tree, or vertical stake, as Jesus and our love of and for our Heavenly Father. We CARRY the horizontal piece to the vertical piece of the Cross where He was lifted up and nailed to the Cross. This is a vivid representation of the journey of the called. Loving people around them until they can acknowledge God and see the Truth of Jesus, be crucified WITH Him, and only then loving Him FIRST while continuing to love all those around them with HIS love.

Perhaps you are unsure of the metaphor because you believe that Jesus carried the WHOLE cross to Golgotha. Then please consider the following...

All of the narratives are silent about the details of the cross Jesus carried, likely because their audience, Jews and Greeks in the 1st century, were well aware of the Romans and their methods of torture. Crucifixion was a common penalty for criminals in the Roman Empire and was used as a public deterrent. Those who read/listened to the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion did not need a detailed description as they knew exactly what it looked like.

Historian Hershel Shanks explains in an article in the Biblical Archeology Review that wood was difficult to acquire and that the Romans reused wooden uprights that were already fixed in the ground. This means anyone who was crucified only had to carry the crossbeam.

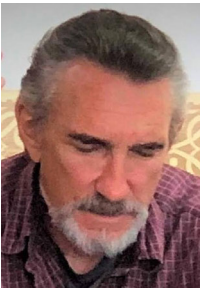
"According to the literary sources, those condemned to crucifixion never carried the complete cross, despite the common belief to the contrary and despite the many modern reenactments of Jesus' walk to Golgotha.

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Instead, only the crossbar was carried, while the upright was set in a permanent place where it was used for subsequent executions. As the first-century Jewish historian Josephus noted, wood was so scarce in Jerusalem during the first century A.D. that the Romans were forced to travel ten miles from Jerusalem to secure timber for their siege machinery.”

This is what it looks like for us... We take up our Cross daily by carrying horizontally (the Crossbeam) the burdens of others out of love for them (that comes from God of course). God bears with us as soon-to-be saints because we have love for our neighbors until we can arrive at our own personal Gethsemane and agree to lay down our lives not ONLY for those around us but for the GLORY OF GOD (the Vertical pole).

Let us not esteem people lightly who do good for others yet are “not Christians”. They have love, so they have God. Show them the best you have of what Jesus looks like and watch them come to the foot of the Cross and receive the salvation prepared for them from before the foundations of the world!



*With Love and Life Abundant,  
- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi*