

# The Call of the Cross to the Fellowship of Christ's Suffering

by Alan Martin

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*The sermon calls us to lay down our lives for others, just as Jesus laid down His life for us, and to follow His example of selfless love and sacrifice.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:6, Matthew 20:28, Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Galatians 5:13

**Topics:** "Suffering"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeing ourselves as servants of God rather than being focused on our own desires and entertainment. He reminds us that as believers, we are not our own, but were bought at a price by Jesus. The speaker encourages us to follow the example of Jesus, who sought out and restored the lost sheep, and challenges us to do the same. He emphasizes that serving others may involve suffering, but it is a way to honor God and bring glory to Him.

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## Transcript

Thank you, Ken. I've been studying just a short series on when I surveyed the wondrous cross. And there are many wonderful messages about the details of the pain and agony that Jesus went through on the cross.

And so we can look at it from various perspectives and make our focus on different aspects of the wonderful grace of God that was displayed there. I wanted to focus on the practical implication for us once we understand the grace of God on the cross. Last week we talked about God's sovereign purpose in our suffering pain.

And our Lord faced this. It was God's will that our Lord suffered. Not just on the cross, but it says He constantly endured opposition from sinful men.

And yet it says, for the joy said before Him, He endured the cross. Even when He had come to that place where His soul was troubled, and He was tempted to question, what shall I say? Father, save me from His hour? And from His Spirit, He said, no. Father, glorify Your name.

And it's that heart, living for the glory of God. That was the joy that Jesus had. That's the joy that you and I can discover if we lose the life of seeking our own interest.

You can discover a life of living to do the will of God, and seek to please the will of God, and experience a joy deeper and richer than any amount of personal entertainment you could ever have. This is what Jesus meant by, he who loses his life will find it. So today, this message wants to focus upon the call of the cross to the fellowship of suffering.

And this suffering is going to involve loving others like Jesus Christ loved us, okay? Once we understand that the suffering of Jesus, He endured the suffering to secure forgiveness of our sins, what we first receive from that is we understand how marvelous it was that He loved us. That's what we should initially receive. You know, behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us.

God demonstrated His own love in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's our first impression. And that's what we are to receive at first.

But this initial understanding is meant to become the way we ourselves should love others, okay? This is what the cross calls us to. A self-absorbed Christian has missed the very heart of the gospel. Now what is a self-absorbed Christian? It's a Christian whose main interest is his own comfort or his own pleasure.

We'll talk about it a little more. I don't want to overly specify that. We can only decide that personally if we're that type of believer.

But a self-absorbed Christian has missed the very heart of the gospel. The love of Jesus Christ was selfless. If Christ had in any way been concerned about His own safety, His own pleasure, His own comfort, there'd be no cross.

There'd be no heaven. The love of Christ is selfless. It's self-denying.

It's completely other-focused. So a Christian who lives for himself rather than to serve others has a perverted understanding of grace. And do you realize you can be a Christian who lives for yourself.

Sometimes we think that being a Christian means only doing good things. We don't do bad things. We don't get drunk.

We don't get high on drugs. We don't party. You know, we don't do those things that we think the people of the world does.

But what's the difference if we do only the good things, but it's still all about our good things. We only go bowling, not dancing. We only go to the lake and fish.

We don't get drunk. So we do good things, but if all those good things still serve me. For example, can you imagine how are we serving others while we're watching television? Can anyone want to raise your hand and say, I serve others by watching television.

You may only choose good shows, right? You may not watch the bad shows, only the good ones. But who is watching and who's benefiting while you're watching? It's about you, isn't it? That's what, that's an example of being self absorbed. You're living for yourself.

So Peter calls us to follow Christ in his example in first Peter chapter two, verse 21. But, but when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is grace before God. Now, can you imagine suffering watching TV? Well, yes.

If you watch the news, it's suffering. Um, no, but I'm seriously, if you're just doing good meanings, doing something good that you enjoy, can you imagine suffering in that? Some people bowl terribly. And so they suffer having to write their score down.

I don't think that's what he's talking about. The kind of good he's talking about doing is serving other people. And when your life is involved in serving other people, I'm going to suffer because not everyone is easy to serve doing.

This is the doing good. He's talking about for this. You were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

So when you do good and suffer, according to Peter, when you do good and suffering, the literal Greek is this is grace. You ever heard that definition of grace? Very clear in the Greek. This is grace before God.

And think about it. Did Christ not do good in redeeming us suffering in the meantime, you are actually participating in the very grace of God. When the good you are doing involves suffering while you're doing it.

If you continue to do that, this is grace before God, because Christ also suffered for us. He left us this as an example. So what example, let's be clear.

What example did Jesus leave us? Let's let's look at that in John chapter 10, verse 17 and 18. Jesus said, therefore, my father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself.

And then in John 15, verse 13, he says, greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends. So the call, the call is to lay down our lives for our friends. That means what we do, we don't do for ourselves.

Well, there's a question we'll ask to gauge this by a little bit later. Living for ourself is not this great love, is it? This is not great love. Just seeking only to do good things that you still are the primary beneficiary of is not the great love the Lord's talking about.

That's that can really mean it's a small self love still. If I were to ask the question, how much of what we do is for others? Let's consider it in this way. Thank God that I'm sure everyone here already is serving others to a large degree.

If you're a mom, you're already serving others in a large degree, aren't you? There are responsibilities that come with a mom. And if you're a wife, you add, there's double. You, you have responsibilities with your husband.

You have responsibilities with your children. If you work on top of that, you have responsibilities with those you're working for. If you're, if you're a dad and a husband and an employee, you have responsibilities.

So the question is not, do you do things for others? Of course you do. That's what we have responsibilities. Here's a question.

Once all the responsibilities that we have naturally are done, what do we call the time after we've done our job and our responsibilities? What do we call that? Oh, I, someone said it right. It, but we call it free time, right? I understand, but I want to, I want to put those together because you're, you're right on track. Here's

the question.

How much of our free time is me time? I know that's why, that's why she's on track. She's, I can tell she's listening. You know, that's the question.

Of course you have to be faithful to your job, faithful to your wife, faithful to your children, faithful to your spouse, of course. But when you have been faithful with there and you have time on your hands, you're sad. Here comes your weekend.

Is it, are we going to go to the lake today or the park or a movie? And if it's, is that all the time? It's just like, is that always the first thing? Does it ever into your mind who has need, who has need? I'm free. What can I do for someone else? That's the question. How much of our free time is me time? We all have responsibilities.

Everyone in the world has responsibilities. Aren't we glad that you know what Jesus never had? You know what Jesus never took? He never took me time. Never.

It was, it was, it just never happened. Jesus embraced suffering for the honor and glory of his father and for the souls of the sheep that were lost. His, his lost sheep.

That's why he's called the good shepherd and the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. And this is where this giving, this giving of our lives for others is going to involve suffering. If, if, if we're dedicated to that now as sheep, you know, we all start off.

Remember that Bible verse for all, we like sheep have done what gone astray. All right. And the Lord wonderfully rescued us.

But now it says we have returned to the shepherd and overseers of our soul. So yes, we all begin like street sheep who've gone astray, but you know what we're to be now. Now we're to become servants who follow our Lord closely doing what he left us as an example to do.

He went out and sought us to bring us back to himself. Aren't we to be about going out and bringing others to restore them to that, which is whole. This is the example he left us.

We are called to lay down our lives. Now in John 13, let someone read this passage a little bit. This is the, from John 13, all the way through John 17 is what we would call the last supper.

That last evening that Jesus spent before his arrest and following crucifixion the next day. All of this takes place from John 13 through about John 17. John 13 is the early part of the evening when they are gathered for that, the last supper.

Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come and that he should depart from this world of the father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end and supper being ended with the devil, having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray him. Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself. And after that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.

And the question I have there on the screen for us is, why did Jesus suddenly act like a common slave? You know, washing the feet of the guest was normally the duty of the lowest slave of the house. So why is Jesus suddenly, God's son, the son of God, Lord of heaven and earth, why is he suddenly acting like the lowest common slave? Why? To demonstrate just how we are to follow. Do you consider yourself a slave to others, a servant to others? Do you live like the Lord is your master and that your primary duty is to make sure that his guests are treated well, that his people have their needs met? Is that how you see yourself? That you're not your own? Didn't the Bible say, we are not our own, we were bought with a price? And so if the Lord is our master and we have discovered the joy of being his servants, don't we look to him and say, what would you have me do, Lord? Who would you have me serve? Where is there need that I can, in your name and through your spirit, give myself to serve and be a blessing to today? That's why Jesus was doing this.

And he said to them, do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you say, well, for so I am. If I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. So a new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you.

Even so, you also love one another. By this, all will know that you are my disciples. If you have love for one another, this by this, all men will know you're disciples, not by being a Baptist, not by attending church, not by having the right set of doctrinal beliefs.

The reason many people do not come to church is because their encounters with those who do. The testimony of the church is not always been that the church loves others as Christ loved them. And you know, if that's the greatest, the greatest commandment, think about it.

Jesus gives one commandment that will fulfill the entire law. How can you wrap up the 613 laws of the old covenant and make a new covenant? And the only commandment you give is one. And the one commandment you give that if you and I will actually do this one commandment, we will do no harm to anyone.

Love does no harm to his neighbor. Love is patient. Love is kind.

It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not self-seeking.

It is not rude. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs.

Love always hopes. It always believes. It always bears.

It rejoices in the truth. Love never fails. And if we simply do this one thing, loving others like Jesus loved us, this is the mark, the mark that will actually testify to the world that we are disciples of Christ.

That's the one. Now think about that. If there's one greatest command and we're not loving others this way, we're failing at the greatest command.

And if you fail at the greatest command, what's the rest of your testimony? This is, and Jesus specifies, it's not just loving others. It's loving others how? Can you say it please? How? As I have, is there anyone Jesus is not willing to forgive? Does Jesus rebroadcast your sins? Well then, do you rebroadcast the sins of others? Would Jesus hold a grudge against you? No. You see, to take these words literally means that we would be full of grace, full of mercy, full of hope.

We would lay down our lives even for those that do us wrong. Isn't that right? Jesus, didn't Jesus say, if you love only those who love you, what do you more than the common man? Don't tax collectors love tax collectors? Don't drunkards love drunkards? Don't thieves love other thieves? So if you only greet those who greet you, if you only accept those who accept you, is that loving others like Christ loved us? No. But if you actually bless those who curse you, if you actually do good to those that hate you, and if you pray for those who are even spitefully using you, isn't this what Jesus was doing? This is how Jesus loves us.

This is the call, this is the way we are to love others. Sadly, not every Christian lives this way. This is just not the way every Christian lives.

The Bible is a very honest book. In his letter to the church of Philippi in chapter three, this is what Paul said. He said, for many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

He's not talking about people in the world. Of course, the people in the world don't even claim to be followers of Christ. He's talking about people who claim to be Christians.

Many people who claim to be Christians are actually walking like they're an enemy of the cross of Christ. And how? It says whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, and who set their mind on evil things, right? No, no, no, don't let me slip that in on you. It does not say who set their mind on evil things.

What does it actually say? Who set their mind on going to the lake is not an evil thing, is it? Watching TV is not an evil thing, is it? Just relaxing to have a good time to kind of give yourself a break, that's not an evil thing, is it? But we better be careful. It can be very earthly. It can be very me oriented.

What are we told to do? Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. And what's, what's, if your mind was set on things above, do you think that the Holy Spirit would be directing our minds to what are the needs of those around us? I had some free time here. Who has a need? Where might I have an opportunity to serve? That, this is the call.

So to live for self-serving interest is to walk as an enemy of the cross. And here's the description that that follows this particular statement. So Paul says, so brethren join in following my example and note those who so walk as you have a pattern of us.

He had just given what the pattern was before he introduced the thought of many actually walk as if they're an enemy of the cross of Christ. He gave his own example. And here's what he said later in that same chapter.

He said, and, and let all who are mature sink as I do. And here's the description of his own example, but what things were gained to me, these, I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. Yet indeed, I also count all things lost for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness, which is from God by faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death.

This is Paul's example, the things that were gained to himself. You know what, you know what Paul gave up readily. That was gained to himself.

Continually. Paul gave up sleep continually. Paul gave up food continually.

Paul gave up even a comfortable place to stay. You know what he was consumed with? He was consumed with carrying the message of Christ to others. And he sacrificed himself to great lengths.

You know, I know, and I want to, I want to be sensitive and I want to be wise because several of you have mentioned you're concerned about myself that I, you don't want me to burn out and you don't want me to too much. You know what? You can't tell that to Paul, can you? He's dead. And we have 13 of his letters in the New Testament.

And by God, that's who I want to follow. I would rather, I'd rather waste my life burning it out than being careful to be comfortable to make sure I don't overdo it. If you're going to err on the side of the right side, I would err on doing way too much for others and leave yourself only a little space.

Because I guarantee you, that's not the way it is in many churches today. We, we give plenty of room for ourselves and a sliver of our time for others. That's the way it really is.

And I want it to be on the, I may leave myself a sliver for myself and my wife and my little precious Hannah. But by the grace of God, you're going to have the rest of the time. You know why? Because everything I do to even the least of you, my brothers and sisters, I do to Christ Himself.

That's, that's, that's what the cross tells me. That's what the cross tells me. I, when I see the way He loved me, when I see the way He loves me, it calls me to love you that way.

That's revelation of the cross. It begins with how wonderful His love for me is. But as it dawns and the day comes to full light, it shows me that my call is to actually follow His example and laying my life down for others.

And you know, there's a secret. I may be, this, this kind of life involves physical suffering, physical suffering. It involves fatigue.

It involves a strain on your time. It involves strain on your resources. But you know what it does provide also? A joy and an inner satisfaction deeper than I can ever get at Six Flags or SeaWorld or from any TV program.

Those things could never give the joy of pouring my life out for others that the Holy Spirit works in me. There's no comparison. I've tasted those other things.

I could go. I can even forward to God. I could go all the time if I wanted to.

And you know, I haven't been in years. You know, you know, I'll go. I will go to SeaWorld.

You know, while I go because my grandsons will want to go and I want to be with them. I'll go for that. You know, I, and I see purpose in that to spend time with them because I didn't, I miss them.

They're not here. But I'm not looking for self-entertainment. I found something deeper and richer.

I see, behold His hands, His feet. Sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e'er such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown? So were the whole realm of nature, mine, that were a present far too small.

We say it. We sing it. Love so amazing, so divine, what? Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Wow. So when we no longer seek our own gain and become locked into fully knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, we have begun to understand the grace of God. That's when, that's when we've begun to understand.

I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Because the more we begin to understand how Jesus loved us, the more we then can begin to see how we are to love others. Loving others will involve enduring suffering.

And to this we were called. This is the call of the cross. If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow me daily.

This is the endure suffering for the sake of others. We've already mentioned this. Any sinner can love those who love them.

But only a saint, only one set apart by the grace of God, elect and chosen by God, born again by the power of God with a new heart and a new mind, dynamically changed by the genuine grace of Jesus Christ. Only that kind of person can genuinely be saved from their own self-interest so they can love even their enemies. Do you remember the harlot that interrupted the dinner that Jesus was at? Jesus had been invited to a dinner.

And right in the middle of the dinner, this harlot with a reputation for being the town harlot, burst in and just fell at His feet. You remember what she started doing? She just started weeping and her tears just started like raining on His feet. And then as she saw that, you know, remember what she did instinctively? She just, her hair was long.

She just began to take her hair and literally wash his feet with her hair, sobbing. And the smug Pharisees sitting in their seats like religious hypocrites, sat there and say, if this man knew what sort of woman this was, he wouldn't let her be doing this. You remember how Jesus answered that? He spoke to the guy named Simon.

I think Simon was the head. He said, Simon, you know, there was a man who had two people that owed him a lot of money. One man owed a lot of money and another man owed a little bit of money.

But the man in his kindness, he canceled the debt of both. He canceled the debt of the great the great debt and he canceled the smaller debt. He goes, Simon, of the two, which do you suppose would love him more? Of course, Simon knew the answer.

Well, the one who's been forgiven the greatest amount. So Jesus, that's what Jesus said. This is what Jesus said.

Whoever has been forgiven much will love much, but whoever has been forgiven little loves little. And this is what I've discovered about Christians. The less you understand about real love and how rotten to the core you were before God, how much God hates sin and how we might think we were good, we might think we were better than someone else.

That just shows such a lack of understanding of how holy God views a fallen race. But when a person understands how much love it took for God to forgive them, that person has a greater appreciation of what

love genuinely is. And that person looks to go to the greatest lengths to be a blessing and service to others because they they're the ones who've been forgiven much.

And the response when you really feel how much God's forgiven you is you just want to you just want to pay back. You just want to say thank you. You want to make sure the Lord knows you're not taking it for granted.

You're appreciating it. So those who truly understand the cross. This is the call they hear.

This is the call that they hear. The call is do you recognize this love? Do you recognize it? I and even before Jesus ever allowed himself to be laid down on those wooden beams and nailed to it, even before then, as he stood there, when they beat him senseless, senseless, they brutalized him. He held his peace.

Why did he hold his peace? Why didn't he revile back? Why didn't he say this is wrong? Why didn't he fight back? Because if he had you and I wouldn't be redeemed. So can you handle a little suffering when someone treats you wrong? When they do you wrong? When in church someone has done wrong and you say, I ain't ever going back there. You listen, anyone who's ever thought that thought, think this.

If Christ had had that, we'd all be in hell. If if Christ had said, I don't deserve that and I'm not, I don't have to put up with that. We'd have no hope.

Would we? I want you to do some thinking. I want you to look at the, the old rugged cross on the hill far away stood what an old rugged cross. And I want you to think you sing this, but I want you to think about what you sing.

It's shame and reproach gladly there. It's time that if we understood the dynamic love of God displayed upon the cross, we would hear a call very clearly. I gave my life for you.

You give your life for someone else. That's the cross. It begins with how wonderful it was for God to love me in this way, but that's only the beginning.

The more you see it, the more you'll see, Lord, I don't want to just see you. I want to be like you. All right, let's pray.

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