

The Enemy of the Cross

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of embracing the cross for true discipleship and spiritual transformation.

Duration: 57:59

Scripture: Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:39, Luke 14:25, Luke 14:27, John 12:48, Acts 10:34-35, Galatians 6:14

Topics: "Discipleship", "The Cross"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praying for understanding and guidance from God. He then reads from Luke chapter 14, where Jesus speaks about the requirements of being his disciple. The speaker shares a personal story about a moment of prejudice and how God challenged him to love others as himself. He emphasizes the need for the cross of Jesus to work in our lives, bringing about a transformation in our attitudes and actions towards others.

Transcript

Welcome to our text Luke chapter 14 from verse 25. If you've opened your Bible don't close it, just keep it open while we pray. Now Lord, we ask thee to touch the eyes of our understanding, that we shall understand, that what we hear will not only be for the birds that are waiting for us outside to pick it up, but speak in such a way that we'll understand, and that it will make sense to us, and that it will sink deep down into our hearts so that our lives will never be the same again.

Be with us, please Lord, and grant that this will be a memorable time, because of you speaking to us through thy Spirit and thy Holy Word. Amen. And there went great multitudes with him, and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to 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. For which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish, so far. Have you made that decision, to bear the cross of the Lord? People will mock you, if you don't go through with it.

And once you've had made that decision, there's no other alternative. You'll have to go through, otherwise you'll be a fool, and the laughing stock, not only of human beings, but the laughing stock of hell as well. If you have taken that cross, there's no turning back.

You'll have to go through. Now, what does it imply? What does it mean to carry the cross, to bear the cross? Well, we touched on it last night. During the day, during the various messages, it was touched upon as well, even if it was presented just in other words, and in another way, but the crux of the matter was still the same.

That we've got to carry the cross. Unless we do so, we cannot be his disciples. Paul boasted of the cross.

He said, I don't want to boast about anything else. I glory in the cross. That's what he gloried in.

It wasn't a burden to him. He didn't murmur. He gloried in the cross.

He knew that the cross was his only hope, and that it was the power of God in his life. May I use this word? The cross was his friend, and he was a friend of the cross. There are some people that can't stand the cross, and the cross can't stand them.

They are not friends of the cross, but as the Bible puts it, the enemies of the cross. And when Paul spoke about those enemies, he didn't do it lightheartedly or jokingly. He did it weeping.

Shall we just turn to that scripture, Philippians chapter 3, verse 18. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. It made him weep.

Why did he weep? Don't imagine for a moment that he spoke about the communists. Don't imagine for a moment that he spoke about the ungodly. If they are the enemies of the cross, we can still understand it.

But if someone who identifies himself with the cross, walks as an enemy, that breaks the heart of the Christian, and any men of God will weep because of such a thing. What kind of people were they? What did they do? Most probably they didn't even realize themselves that they were branded as enemies of the cross. Why? What did they do? What were they guilty of? Paul says, their God is their belly.

They mind earthly things. That's the 19th verse. A person who minds earthly things is an enemy of the cross.

Our Rhodesian friend said he's not politically minded, because if you're politically minded, you mind earthly things. He says our citizenship, as the Bible puts it, is up there. We mind the things up there, not these things.

Any born again Christian, any Christian who minds the things of this earth is an enemy of the cross in God's eyes. If your interest, if your heart, if your desire is in things of this world, your walk is one who is an enemy of the cross. And it's these enemies that do us most harm.

It's not the communists that harm the gospel most. It's the Christian who walks as an enemy of the cross. They made Paul weep.

He cried. The cross wasn't active in their lives. They didn't carry the cross.

They didn't bear the cross. They opposed the cross. They went against the cross.

Their God was their belly, their flesh. We read in Galatians that we are crucified unto the world. The world is crucified unto us because of the cross.

Because of the cross, our lusts of the flesh have been crucified. Our affections have been crucified. The affections are dead.

They nailed to the cross. And when they nailed to the cross, what would you have said of the Lord if he would have done what the people told him to do, to get off that cross? He could have done it. There was that possibility.

Don't think for the moment that those nails kept him to the cross. He could have got off there. And quite easily.

But he didn't. Now if he would have got off that cross, my what a dilemma, what a tragedy it would have been. And what a tragedy if you get off that cross, which is possible.

There is such a thing that a person literally gets off that cross and he doesn't stay there. He's not dead to these things. It gets too much for him.

He can't bear it any longer. And then he does something. And in doing that, he disassociates himself with the cross.

And becomes, in so doing, becomes an enemy of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We heard that the cross kills. It bends.

It's the end. It spells the end of the flesh of ourselves. The flesh and the cross, the flesh and the spirit doesn't go together.

Now I would like to suggest that the cross is between the flesh and the spirit. I'd like to see the cross in between. There can't be a Pentecost without the cross.

Before there can be a Pentecost, there has got to be a cross. A cross before Pentecost. And we have got to examine and thoroughly test any Pentecost without the cross.

Because there is a possibility that it isn't a Pentecost from above, but from below. First the cross, and then Pentecost. And in that same order in our lives.

First death. The death of the flesh. Because the flesh walls and goes against the spirit.

And the spirit is against the flesh. Those things don't go together. And that's why the cross has got to be lifted up, so to say, in our lives.

We've got to take the cross and bear the cross. The cross is the end of self. It's the end of the flesh.

It's the end of our affections. It's the end of our lusts. It simply means death.

But you know, it's not only the death in the end of evil things, but even good things. Paul says, the things that were gained to me, I counted as loss. You see, because of Christ.

The cross was at work. He was a Pharisee, born of the Pharisees. He was circumcised.

Oh, there are so many good qualities in his life. But he says, I've lost everything. I count it as damn.

He hates it. He loathes it. He's thrown it behind himself.

He forgets it. The cross was at work in his life. He was dead to those things.

He counted them as damn. He didn't do what many do. They lose something, and then they murmur.

And then they can't stop being resentful, blaming others for having lost that thing. Oh, he's like the children of Israel that were saved. And yet, having crossed the Red Sea, being saved by the blood, they looked back and desired things in Egypt.

They went dead to it. They had left it. They were laid out of it.

But those things were still in them. You see, the cross hadn't been at work in their lives. Maybe their work hadn't gone very, very deep in their lives.

They were in Egypt. Oh, how they moaned and groaned because of being slaves in that country. And they cried God to set them free.

They didn't cry because they were slaves of sin. They didn't come to God because they wanted inward cleansing. They were troubled.

They wanted freedom, liberty, set free of their oppressors. Those were material things, not spiritual things. You may say, yes, it's got a spiritual meaning, of course.

But it can happen that even in our day, a person comes to Christ because of a sick child. A person comes to Christ because he's in financial distress. A person comes to Christ because he's in such a political situation that he doesn't know a way out.

And because of those things, he comes to Christ. But there's no conviction of sin. That's why he comes to Christ with a smile on his face.

It doesn't go very deep. It's been dealt with. God will be in his life.

And when the cross has been at work in our lives, then we're no more self-conscious, but God-conscious. And if somebody's self-conscious, it's just a proof that God is missing. If you are God-conscious, and God is within you, the cross is at work, then self has been put to death.

It isn't self. A person isn't full of self. He's full of the Spirit of God.

God is at work within him through the cross. And because of the cross in his life. So there may be things.

Paul spoke of his tradition. Paul spoke of Judaism. Paul spoke of all those things.

And he says, because of the gospel of the cross, because of Christ, the preaching of the cross, I've lost all those things. You see, the cross deals with everything. Father, mother, wife, child, possession, position, even yourself.

Whether it's good or bad. It strips us of everything. And only one thing remains.

The one who was on the cross. Only Christ. Then he rules through his Spirit within us.

I'd like just to share a bit out of my own life how God dealt with me because of the cross. For many years, I walked as an enemy of the cross as well. There were many things in my life that didn't go together with the

cross.

The cross wasn't there in my life. I still remember the day when we prayed for an outpouring of the Spirit. For a Pentecost.

I didn't realize that the cross had to be at work first. And the deeper it goes, the better for us. And the better for the Spirit of God.

Because if the cross didn't work in our lives, oh friends, the end will be destruction, Paul sees. The cross was at work in his life. And as I once prayed with a group of about 30 blacks, and we cried to the Lord with strong crying, I said, oh, I'm ashamed of it.

There's the magistrate outside, the assistant, the postmaster, the police sergeant. And what will they think of me, being a white, being in a room with the blacks crying like this? What will they think of me? And I closed the window. And as I shut the window, God said, alright, you carry on, close the window, then I'll be outside, and you'll be inside.

And there'll be no way of me getting into that building. I understood that language. I understood.

You see, we say, there's only one way to God, that's via the cross. And there's only one way that God can come to you, that's via the cross. It's death.

And the death of Christ, where we die with Him. What will you profit if He dies alone, and you didn't die? You've got to die with Him. Otherwise His death is just foolishness to you.

You've got to be identified with Him. And you've got to identify yourself. You've got to be there.

We died with Him. We rose with Him. Won with Him in His death.

Won with Him in His resurrection. And that cross must be evident in our lives. And God can come in when that cross has dealt with our flesh.

Flesh is not only the sixth commandment. Irritability is flesh. Self is flesh.

Flesh is anything that's in opposition to the will of God, that doesn't bow under the cross. And it's not just bowing, it's breaking. God can't really be at work in our lives if we've never broken.

When we come to the end of ourself, and when our heart breaks, then the Spirit of God can take over. Then the Spirit of God can move in our lives. But before then, He's only grieved and quenched.

Only when the cross is at work, and the cross breaks self and self-will, breaks the world, breaks the flesh in our lives, then there can be a real Pentecost. A Pentecost that can shake the world. I don't think that there has ever been a time in history when there have been so many so-called Spirit-filled and baptized people in the world.

But I don't think that there has... Well, not at least in the early church, a time when the church has been shaken as it is shaken today. And it should just be the other way around. The world should be put on its head because of all the Spirit-filled ones.

But strange to see the Spirit-filled ones standing on their head, upside down, shaken by the things of this world. Some even their carnal desires. Some on the altar of lust and of sex, awaiting the fire from heaven.

There will be a different fire burning on that altar. A different fire will come down, or should I rather say come up. It won't be the fire from above, but another fire that kindles the tongue of a gossip.

That's a different kind of fire. The cross deals with these things. And I knew it wasn't the glass-keeping God outside.

It was my pride. The cross kills pride. It deals with pride.

And that was the first thing God dealt with. He dealt with the pride in my life. I was full of self, full of self-will, full of pride.

And the heart broke. And I cried like a little baby. After some days, it was late.

As I pulled in, I still had to go to the home. I heard these Africans singing. And I felt urge to go there, right there and then.

And I said, Oh God, I can't go there. I can't preach without wearing a suit, without a tie, just in my dirty clothing. I can't stand there before the congregation just like this.

What will so-and-so say? What will so-and-so think? What will so-and-so, how will so-and-so feel? You see, humanly speaking, I'm using wrong words now. The cross hadn't done its job yet in my life. There was still so-and-so on the throne.

There was still so-and-so how he felt. There was still the opinion of so-and-so. You see, these things hadn't been ruthlessly dealt with, because the cross is ruthless.

And God said, Oh Elo, is that where you stand? We heard someone mentioning here of the prophets saying, God before whom I stand. They stood before God. They were God-conscious.

But we, man-conscious, self-conscious, world-conscious, you see, pleasing men. I loved it. I used to sit at that table and enjoy that food.

Fame. My, that's wonderful pudding. And God said, Is that where you are? It means death.

You've got to die to these things. If you don't die, your end won't be progress and victory, but destruction. You're an enemy of the cross.

If you haven't died, then the heart broke again. And God seeks those that are broken-hearted. That's the people with whom he dwells, where he is to be found.

And then one day, as I was walking along, head and shaved, I said, Man, I can't go like this. You know, I had a cousin who was known all over for not shaving. He'd even go to the city.

And we were so disgusted and ashamed that he was a steegan like us. And he'd just go to Peter Meritsburg without having shaved. And I said, I can't go to the service like this.

What will the world think? You see, I don't know why I said it. It just came up in me. Well, what comes up, comes from here.

It makes us a lot of, gives us, sometimes, makes us think sometimes, we say, Is it from within? Is it from without? But that what comes out here is simply from the heart, according to what the Lord said. Ask the

Lord to cleanse that heart and that the cross will be at work in that heart. And God said, Elo, is that where you are? Aren't you dead to the world? The world was very, very alive.

And to me, in actual fact, I was more ruled and governed by the world than by God. I had other gods in my life. Maybe it was good that Paul didn't live in my time.

He would have spent many years weeping. But I'm only sorry that the one who suffered on the cross, that his suffering didn't end there, but that he still suffers today. And those thorns are driven deeper into his brow.

And those nails are driven deeper into his hands. Because he can be crucified all over again. When we sin, he feels it.

It's painful to him. Oh, if only the cross would be at work in our lives. And that it may be true, we are dead, we are crucified unto the world.

The world is crucified unto us, where we lose our life, where we lose self. And it goes into fulfillment that the greatest becomes the smallest. You can't do that unless you've died.

The first, the last, the greatest, the least, that can be only wrought in our lives by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. His cross can bring about such a thing. And then I remembered the words of our late Prime Minister, Dr. Verwoerd, how he said one day, Ons mut ons naste liefde sus ons self.

We've got to love our neighbor as ourselves. And he was referring to the black men. And the Lord challenged me with those words.

He says, Do you love the black men as you love yourself? Do you? I said, Oh God, if I'm honest, no, I love them, but I can't say I love them as myself. And then, what you want others to do to you, you do to them. Oh my, I said, No, I can't do to, treat the black men as people treat me.

Never. I can't do such a thing. If they come to me, I take them into the back door, and if I give them a cup of coffee, the cup will be a mug.

I can't do such a thing. But if somebody else would treat me like that, what would I think? What would I say? Tell me, dear friend, how could my life be changed? There is no other way but by the cross. There's no other way.

I said, God, I can't treat the black men the way people treat me. What will the end be? They sit on my head. I can't do such a thing.

If I walk along with a suitcase, somebody else comes to me and offers to take my suitcase, and he carries my suitcase. If I see a black man, should I go to him and offer to take, carry his suitcase? Never. I can't do such a thing.

I can't. And God said, The preaching of the cross is foolishness to you. You're an enemy of the cross.

Christ didn't die only for you. He died for them, and he gave his life for them. Not to fight them, but to die for them.

And if we walk in his footsteps, you see, that doesn't only refer to the black men, but I'm just using it by way of example, just to show you how the cross was at work in my life, and how the cross had to be at work before there could be a Pentecost in my life. And the cross went deep, and I said, God, I can't die. I can't.

Rather take me, send me away to another island. But here in my own home country, I can't. What will my own family say? What will my own brothers say? What will the people say? I was right at the back again.

I didn't hate them, for Christ's sake. I didn't count those things as done. I was alive to these things.

And I walked as an enemy of the cross. As an enemy of the cross. And the Lord said, What you do to the least you've done to me.

Who's the least in your eyes? It needn't necessarily be a black. I leave it over to you, you know. Who's the least in your eyes? In your Christian eyes, who's the least? And the Lord Jesus says, The day will come when everybody will receive his reward.

We'll all have to appear before the great white throne, we that we are saved, to receive according to what we have done while we were in this world, whether it is good or evil. We'll receive our reward. And then he says, He'll take the least and say, What you've done to the least you've done to me.

One can measure one's spiritual life. You can measure exactly how close you are to Christ. How much you love him, by simply taking the least in your eyes, who believes in him, and measure your relationship with that person.

You are not an inch closer to Jesus, than what you are to that least one. It's all spiritual hamburger. You're living in a fool's paradise.

You're bluffing yourself. You're walking around as a Christian, and you don't know that heaven brains you as an enemy of Christ, and an enemy of the cross. Take the least.

Your interest in him is your interest in Christ. Your love for that man is your love for Christ. That's the preaching of the cross.

That is what the cross does in the life of a person who carries it, and carries it daily, where nothing else has got any say in your life. It's only Christ. You die to everything else, and Christ reigns supreme.

And that makes it possible for him to pour out his spirit, and where he can work and send us, as it is written there, as my father has sent me, even so send I you. But he can't send you, if you don't carry the cross. You can't even be his disciple, if you can't bear the cross.

Is this too difficult? There's no way of turning back, unless you are prepared to become the laughing stock of hell. And I said, Oh God, I can't. It made me sweat.

It gave me sleepless nights. I awoke. I didn't have malaria.

I didn't have flu. My pillow was wet. I couldn't carry on sleeping like that.

I've had to change things. Why? This cross was leading me to Calvary. The cross was leading me to Golgotha, to the place of the skull, to the place of dead bones, to the place where I had to die.

No other way out. I had to die, and I had no leg to stand on. And God said, Well, the door is wide open.

You can leave. But if you want life, if you want life, new life and walking newness of life, you've got to die before you can be raised. We've got to go into the grave.

We've got to die before we can be raised. Die to self. Die to everything.

And how marvelous when those things were put to death. But how terrible. Death doesn't appeal to us.

If we could, if there'd be a way of escape, we'd run. We'd fly. But we can't.

We've got to face it, whether we like it or not. And then there was my tradition, my ways. I said, Oh God, I want Pentecost.

Oh God, I want Pentecost, but no tongues. You know why? I knew two people that spoke in tongues. And the one used to fool around with other women.

And the other had a very bad vocabulary. And I used to go around and openly challenge Pentecostals and say, Is that spirit filled? Do you tell me you baptized into the fire of God, the spirit of God, and you live such a life? Oh friends, let's not take the pearls and throw them before the swine. If we claim to have a lot, let's see to it that we walk accordingly.

And not bring disgrace and dishonor upon that which is holy, pure, and clean, and godly, and divine. And God said, Why don't you want it? If I come down, I come down as a sovereign God and I work as I like. Nobody can dictate to me.

I work as I will. And unless you are prepared to let me have my will, you can't be spirit filled. You can be half full, and the glass can be full, but if you take all, by the time you've got all the stones out of the glass, it's only half.

So in actual fact, it isn't really full. It seems to be overflowing, but you get out what's within. Then you'll see, maybe it's less than half.

Let the cross deal with those things. Let that which is within come out, so that you can, in truth, be really spirit filled, and that because of such a life, the world will be shaken. And the world will feel the impact, and even if it be one man, the world can't be the same again, or a woman, or a child, because of one person who is really spirit filled.

A person who has experienced Calvary, who has experienced death, and then daily taking the cross, and then experiencing Pentecost. And then the spirit will come down, and not only speak in tongues that need interpretation, and sometimes you'll have to have a dictionary, and some volumes of commentaries to make out what that tongue says. But at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, He spoke right there and then, and everybody present could understand, whether they spoke the Greek language, or the Jewish language, Hebrew language, or whatever language it was.

All those present could understand. Then you'll live a life that your garden boy and your kitchen girl will understand, and not that they shake their head and say, the missus says she's safe, but it doesn't make sense to us. The way she scolds us and speaks to us, as if she'd speak to a dog.

But if it's the spirit at work, the literate and illiterate, the high and low, black and white, will understand, and they'll bow to the cross as well. And they'll give glory to God because of what they see in your life. And dear friends, it pays to pay the price.

It pays to go through a thousand times, if you've got to die a thousand times, do so. Because to live that life is worthwhile. Is worthwhile.

After the Spirit of God came down, within a week, within a day, more happened than what happened in the previous twelve years in my ministry. Oh, when God's Spirit came down, and He came over those areas, and He came down in that area, you know what He did? He brought the people. He started with the strongholds of evil.

The first people that were converted were the witches. Then the witch doctors, then the possessed. We'd ask them, who has brought you here? Who's invited you? Who told you? Nobody.

God had come down. The Spirit of God came down, literally went into the homes and brought them. The first witch who had a training center for young witches said, I want Jesus to break these chains of hell in my life.

I want Jesus to set me free, not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit. I never knew how does one wrestle with powers and principalities. I thought of the flesh.

You see, we so often take it literal. When God says something, immediately we think of material things. And we take it literally.

When God says, wash your hands, you double-minded. Wash your hands, you sinners. He doesn't say that we should wash these.

Of course, we've got to wash our hands. But if He says, wash your hands, you sinners, He doesn't speak of these hands. But we immediately go to these hands in our mind.

We've got spiritual hands. And God says, you sinner, wash those hands and cleanse those hands. Cleanse them.

And when the Holy Spirit came, He convicted the world of sin, of righteousness, of judgment. How can He do that through you if the world is still within you? How can He convict the world if you're still full of the world? How can He? How can we expect that the Holy Spirit can move through us, reach the heathen? And heathenism hasn't been dealt with in our lives. You know what happens? The blacks, they get converted by the hundreds and by the thousands.

You see, they're all heathen. But they shake their head. They say, we blacks, we heathen, we become Christians.

But we see the Christians becoming heathens. We get dressed, the whites get undressed. To undress is heathenism in its rawest sense.

If we try to lower our shirts, dresses as far down as possible to the breasts, as much as possible at the back, that's raw heathenism. Raw heathenism. But praise God that heathens can get converted as well.

And may our preaching be such that the heathen will get converted. And we've got many whites that are heathens, maybe more than blacks in the world today. They can be counted by the millions.

And it isn't getting better. Some years ago we were shocked when we heard about the bikini. Oh my! But today it's nothing out of the ordinary to see a Christian, a saved child of God, walking the beaches like that.

And yet, it's too much coverage today. If you knew it, all those proclaimed areas, beaches overseas and in Europe, where they don't dress at all. They say it's healthy.

You get sun-turned from head to toe. And maybe you'd be shocked if I tell you how many members of those organizations, how many amongst those members are ordained ministers of recognized churches. Maybe you'd be shocked if I tell you the number of our many ministers sun-turned on those beaches.

Maybe you'd be shocked. But God says a thought is just like a deed. You know what your thought life is like.

Don't point a finger at them. If the cross hasn't done its work in you, the cross deals with the world. The cross deals with being sexy.

The cross deals with our body, the lusts of the flesh. If it hasn't dealt with it, you're an enemy of the cross. In spite of the fact that you call yourself a Christian and you can bluff those that are as blind as what you are, but those with discernment and understanding will know what kind of a label to put around your neck.

And surely the devil knows what you are worth. And he doesn't respect a life where the cross of Christ hasn't done its work, where the cross of Christ hasn't done its job. That's why we get superficiality in the Christian life.

That's why we still need rules and regulations. Oh, are we allowed to do this? Are we allowed to do that? How far can we go? How close to the world? Some people shouldn't be Christians at all. They should be models in worldly shops.

They can be free and show the world how to be worldly. But the cross will deal even with your dresses. I'm not a fanatic, I'm not narrow-minded, I'm just on the narrow path.

I just like to preach what the gospel teaches us. The preaching of the cross, it doesn't appeal to the world. But it converts the heathen, or it chases them away.

But if you want a real Pentecost, if you want a life of power, if you want your life to be of meaning in the kingdom of God, let the cross do its work. And there is no other way but by the cross. It's just the cross that will be able to get us where God wants us to be.

And it's only by the way of the cross that we live the life that we are supposed to live. God has sent us to convert the heathen, not that the heathen should convert us, to change the world, to convert the world, not that we should be influenced by the world. We've got to present the cross, and where the glory of the cross can be seen on our foreheads, and not the picture of the world.

And where our hands and fingers, our whole being, will show the world that we are bearing the cross of our Lord. That we don't walk around as enemies of the cross, but people that are bent and broken because of the cross. But, praise God, that brokenness is just a way to reveal God's glory.

You remember the message we heard this afternoon, glory and virtue, purity, spiritual cleanliness, revealing the cross of Christ. Oh dear friends, it's plain mockery if we have a lovely cross here around our necks, or carry it, or even with our lips, if our life and our behavior and our words and our actions and our walk is contrary to the cross. The Lord says, I didn't come to judge you, but the word which I have spoken will judge you.

And the word says, it's possible to walk as an enemy of the cross. And that made Paul weep. And the Lord Jesus said, if you don't hate even your own life, your own looks, your own beauty, your own self, you cannot be his prophet.

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