

"Timeless Classic Doctrine #5 - Theology of the Cross"

In the 1992 military legal drama "A Few Good Men," there is a timeless classic scene between Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. Tom Cruise plays a military lawyer and he is questioning Jack Nicholson who plays a Marine Colonel. Cruise is trying to get Nicholson to admit that he ordered two marines to carry out a "Code Red" upon another marine who was not fitting in and was failing his training. A "Code Red" was essentially beating up the marine to send him the message that he should shape up. However, the marine who received the "Code Red" died from his injuries. During the timeless classic scene Cruise demands that Nicholson tell the truth. Nicholson responds angrily and arrogantly "You can't handle the truth." Nicholson's logic was that Americans really don't want to know what happens behind the scenes in the military to ensure that we enjoy the freedoms that we do in our country. I think as Christians we are tempted to approach being a follower of Christ in this way. We are tempted to think that being a follower of Christ should mean that every aspect of our lives on earth should be easier and better. We want to focus on positive aspects of Christianity and not the difficulties. Martin Luther called this a Theology (religion) of Glory. Being a follower of Christ does make life easier in some ways and better in some ways, but it also makes it harder and tougher in some ways. And being a follower of Christ does not exempt us from difficulty and hardship. True glory won't happen until Heaven. Unlike Jack Nicholson, Jesus thinks we can handle the truth, so he reminds us in our Scripture lessons today (Jeremiah and Paul perfect examples) that being a Christ follower on this earth means you need to embrace timeless classic doctrine #5 – The theology (religion) of the cross. To fully appreciate this timeless classic doctrine, consider the "truths" Jesus shared with his disciples before he sent them out to do mission work.

- **"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words..."(Matt. 10:14)**
- **"Be on your guard against men, they will hand you over to local councils and flog you in their synagogues." (Matt. 10:17)**
- **"But when they arrest you..." (Matt. 10:19)**
- **"Men will hate you because of me." (Matt. 10:22)**
- **"When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another." (Matt. 10:23)**
- **"Do not suppose I (Jesus) have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'" (Matthew 10:34-36)**
- **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:37-38)**

In the middle of those theology of the cross thoughts from Jesus we find our sermon lesson for today - Matthew 10:24-33.

(24) "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25) It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

(26) "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (27) What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

(28) Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (32) "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (33) But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

I have yet to be physically harmed, had to flee to another location, or been arrested for being a Christian. Your experience has probably been the same as mine. I have experienced people ignoring and mocking the message of God's Word I shared with them. I have experienced the hatred of people from afar openly hating the Christian faith I hold dear and indirectly hating me for believing it. I have experienced the persecution of awkward and tense relationships with family, friends, and acquaintances because our religious beliefs differ. I have experienced the cross of feeling different than others because I strive to follow God's Word and live my Christian faith and that means my words, actions, and decisions are going to look strange, weird, and unnecessary to others and will involve certain sacrifices of time and money that other people aren't concerned about. I imagine you have experienced all of those scenarios as well. Did I sign up for this? I know I've asked that question on occasion. Maybe you have as well. While bearing crosses for being a follower of Christ aren't easy or comfortable, we shouldn't be surprised that this is part of the Christian life on earth. **"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!"** (Matthew 10:24-25). Beelzebub is another name for the Devil or one of the demons. Some non-Christian people do look at Christians as being demonic because of the way we believe and live. In fact, Jesus was accused of getting the power to do his miracles from Beelzebub (Luke 11:14-26). Jesus point is that if his life on earth was difficult and filled with hardship, then his followers should expect their life to be similar. Embrace the theology of the cross.

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven...Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:32-33, 37-39). Did I sign up for this? I know I've asked that question on occasion. Maybe you as well. I think of my wonderful mother and my three dear children and I think – "I'm one who is not worthy." I think about all the times that I have remained silent in words and actions when given the opportunity to acknowledge to others that Jesus is my Savior and my conscience is filled with guilt. I think of how often I have tried to avoid the "cross" by failing or refusing to deny myself and instead have chased after my own pleasures or desires rather than the will of God and now my head is hanging in shame. I think of all the times I have tried to find joy in life by focusing on me – my feelings, my popularity, my opinions and I realize that while it can lead to some temporary joy it doesn't lead to a lasting feeling of a fulfilled life. Can you relate with me? Embrace the weight of these words: **"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell"** (Matthew 10:28).

And so we all ask again, "Did we sign up for this?" How could we have. We are such miserable failures that Jesus couldn't possibly allow us to even see the sign-up sheet, much less allow us to grab the

pen and sign our names to it. How valuable, then, to remember that the one who urges us to take up our cross also took up his cross, THE Cross of Hell and eternal punishment. And yes, even though we already know that, we need to hear it over and over again, day after day, that he paid for our sins in full. Because of Jesus bearing THE Cross, as our substitute, we have no more need to feel unworthy, feel guilty, feel ashamed, and feel unfulfilled. Jesus perfect cross bearing covers over our lives of imperfect cross bearing in the sight of God so that God now considers each of us to have perfectly carried our crosses and to have perfectly acknowledged Jesus to others. And, **"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven"** (Matthew 10:32). Jack Nicholson doesn't think we can handle the truth, but Jesus does. Yes, all of us will benefit greatly if we continue to ponder and wrestle with Jesus words throughout our lives on earth, **"whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** We all have much to learn when it comes to bearing our crosses and living for Jesus on this earth. But even though that is true, this is also true. Want eternal life in Heaven? Through faith in Jesus you find it. Want life satisfaction that is lasting? In spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ you find it. Want real fulfilling recognition? Remember that the almighty and loving Triune God baptized you into his family, so you are recognized as a child of the one true God.

Did we sign up for this? No, but as a gift of undeserved love God signed each of us up for this when he brought us to trust in Jesus as our Savior. So embrace timeless classic doctrine #5 – the Theology of the Cross. And as you do, remember God's promise: **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"** (Matt. 10:29-31). If God cares about the sparrows, then he definitely cares about you and me. He will help us endure our crosses. And he will even use them to benefit us and others until we are safely enjoying the glory of Heaven. Amen.