

Bible Study Notes 1-27-2016

³⁰ And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. ³¹ And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. ³⁴ And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. **Mark 8:30-34**

Archbishop Averky notes that the Jews were expecting a mighty warrior king, like King David as their Messiah. Peter had this idea too, but when Christ talked about His suffering and crucifixion, Peter could not bear the idea that the Messiah would suffer and die and so rebuked Jesus. Jesus calls him 'satan' because it was as though satan had used Peter's Jewish zeal to try and stop or deny Christ's suffering & crucifixion.

"Whoever, then, wants to come after Him as His follower, let him deny himself, in accordance with what He said (Matt. 16:24 & Mark 8:34), and thus will he be able, having taken up his cross, to follow Him; for the Cross shows that we are ready for every affliction and every hardship, and even for death itself. Just as he who has been made ready to be crucified has in his mind the thought of death, which is the only thing he thinks about, and in this way comes forth to the place of execution as a man who does not reckon that he has even a short time to live in this world, so should he think who desires to put into practice what the Lord says: "If any man will come after Me..." That is, "he who wishes" — the Lord says — "to live in this world will remove himself from true life; but he who thinks, out of longing for Me, to sacrifice his life will not suffer any reproach or harm in eternal life"

From henceforth, then, prepare to absent your soul wholly from this life, and "I will give you eternal life" — says the Lord — "just as I promised you; and in this life I will demonstrate My promise in deed, and henceforth you will receive assurance of the good things to come and pledges of these goods." Unless, then, you first turn away from the present life, you not find eternal life; and once you have begun to struggle in preparing for this, then you will regard all those things that are reckoned to be exceedingly tiresome and distressing as unworthy of consideration. For unless one first turns from his life in the world, on account of his desire for the future life, one cannot withstand afflictions." Abba Isaac, Evergetinos Vol. 1 p.239-40

St. Theophylact says that when Christ rebuked Peter, it was as if to say, 'Do you find fault with Me, Peter, because I take up the cross? I say to you, that neither you, nor

anyone else, will be saved unless you die for the sake of goodness and truth.' St. Theophylact also says that Christ does not compel anyone to die on a cross against his own will, which is why he says "whosoever desireth to follow Me..." And also, since many in those days were crucified for being bandits, the Lord added that one ought to have virtue, for this is what is meant by 'follow Me' for 'whosoever shall lose his life for My sake' shall find life (but the death of a condemned man, or of one who hangs himself, is not for Christ's sake and brings no such reward).

St. Innocent of Alaska wrote the following in his short book "An Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven:"

To deny oneself means to give up one's bad habits, to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world: not to cherish bad desires and thoughts, to quench and suppress bad thoughts; to avoid occasions of sin; not do or desire anything from self-love, but to do everything out of love for God. To deny oneself means, according to the Apostle Paul, 'to be dead to sin and the world, but alive to God.'

To take up our cross: the word cross means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. There are exterior and interior crosses. To take up one's cross means to accept and bear (without complaint) everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in our life...and bear it all with love, with joy and firmness.

To follow Christ means to imitate in all our works and acts the works and acts of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ lived and acted on earth, so we should also live and act...also to obey the word of Jesus Christ...to listen to, believe and practice all that Christ said in the Gospel and through His Apostles...

A common misunderstanding about this teaching of Christ, is that it somehow does not apply to us lay people who live in the world, but only to monastics and perhaps a few extraordinary righteous people who by God's Providence, have been chosen above all mankind to become the rare exceptions and who live a righteous and virtuous life. However, if this were true, Christ would have made this clear to us from the beginning; saying for example, 'If any monastics or exceptional righteous lay people want to come after Me, let THEM deny themselves, take up THEIR cross and follow Me. The rest of you regular, normal lay people will still inherit salvation and eternal blessedness with no effort on your part.'

However, was the woman taken in adultery a pious monastic or an extraordinary righteous person? No, she was a wretched sinner who nevertheless repented of her sin and Christ forgave her. Was the publican a pious man? No, he was a corrupt, greedy

person, but he repented and the Lord said it was he that was justified before God—not the outwardly righteous Pharisee who was full of pride. Jesus Himself even said, I come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

As the Apostle Paul says, 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' That is, we are all weak and sinful. Yet, in our fallen human nature and our pride, we want to be justified. One temptation to justify ourselves is to make excuses for our weakness.' Since a monk or nun has taken monastic vows and dedicated their life to prayer and fasting, we might think: 'well that's all well and good for them, but I am not a monk; I have a family to take care of, I have to earn a living and pay bills...I don't have time to pray to fast...so therefore, the spiritual commandments Christ gives us in the Gospel apply only to monks or nuns.

This is where we need to look more deeply. The Lord and His Apostles blessed marriage and family as honorable. He welcomed little children to come to Him. Yet He certainly admonished Peter for desiring things of the world instead of things of God and He often admonished other people for their lack of faith, their coldness or heart, their attention only to the external, materialistic aspects of religion while denying the spirit and heart of religious faith. He gave teaching and commandments to ALL without distinction and yet He did not expect people to do anything that was beyond their ability or strength to do. Some who were sick, He simply healed without their even asking. Others, He challenged to have greater faith, knowing that they could rise to that challenge. He expected much of His Apostles, but not as much from others who were weaker. YET, He invites everyone to come after Him, AND He offers His help to all if they will only ask Him.

It is not easy to always practice our Christian faith. We have many temptations before us, but at least let us try. If we don't always succeed, let us not lose hope, but rather ask God's help and keep trying and as our Lord promised: 'He who endures to the end will be saved!'

Amen!