Luke 14:27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

I have a confession to make. In all the years that I have preached and contemplated this particular verse and the ones like it I have missed one small but rather interesting fact. That one small but very interesting fact is that when Jesus spoke these words and others like it, Jesus had not yet himself carried his actual cross or suffered the crucifixion of the cross! That is important to know. Because if you don’t realize that simple fact of reference, then I think we have a tendency to define and look at everything this passage implies, through only that cross of Jesus. We have a tendency to define the idea of the cross and limit it to hardships suffered because you are a Christian. In other words, since Jesus carried his cross as an innocent man, therefore when we speak of carrying our cross it is limited to things we suffer and yet we are innocent. Jesus carried his cross because the world hated him and therefore our cross carrying is only about suffering because we are Christians. But is that right to do?

Since Jesus has not carried his cross yet and since his hearers had no knowledge that Jesus would even carry his cross (mind you, Jesus would have known the cross was coming) it is clear that these words need to be understood in a broader way than we normally do. I believe the words of our text bear that thought out. So, let’s turn our attention to our text for today under this theme: **CROSS BEARING.**

Now please, I don’t want you to think that I am not going to include in this discussion that cross of Jesus and what it meant for him to carry it. For that matter, I think this discussion has to begin with the cross of Jesus and exactly what it means for this text. After all, as I said earlier, Jesus would have known that the cross was in his future and Jesus would have known what he intended to say in that regard, yet be aware that his hearers at this point do not have this reference point for themselves.

What can we say of the actual cross of Jesus? He did carry it. There is no doubt that Jesus was forced to carry his cross as he marched out to the place of crucifixion. But realize that even in that fact we still need to work at getting a symbolic meaning from that event. I say that for a number of reasons. First, realize that Jesus did not carry his cross all the way! He actually stumbled and fell numerous times until the Roman guards, in order to get on with the job, grabbed Simon of Cyrene and made him finish carrying the cross of Jesus! I think that important to get into our head. Jesus, as true man, needed help to carry his cross!

Now, don’t be shocked at such a thing. Why do you think time and time again in God’s Word you and I are encouraged to take care of each other? When Jesus entered Gethsemane, did he not ask his disciple to watch and pray with him? In Gal 6:2 we are told, **“Bear one another’s burdens.”** In James 5 we are told, **“pray for one another.”** Throughout God’s Word we are encourage to help each other in every way to make sure that souls are brought to the Lord and kept in the Lord. There are just times in our lives, just as for Jesus, when we need help in carrying our load. I believe that help we are to give is a part of the cross that we are to carry. The cross in the sense of helping and aiding each other.

Or consider this. As I just mentioned Jesus, in his state of humiliation, in the agony of his physical abuse and bodily suffering, had been so weakened that he was not able to fully carry his cross! He needed help. Yet recognize that at this point it was not the cross that caused the agony and suffering. It was the abuse, beatings and scourging beforehand that so weakened Jesus. Big lesson here. That abuse, beatings and scourging took place at the hand of man. The sinfulness of this world, the hatred of the world for God, the desire of the world to lash out at God as unfair and unjust is just something that you and I can expect. The end result of what this world will do to us is carrying the cross.

Just as Jesus was forced to the cross by his enemies, so it will be for us. The world will hate us just as it did Jesus. The world will ridicule, slander, and persecute us because we belong to God. Make no mistake, as a child of God, just like the son of God, the world will throw a cross at you.

In our weekday Bible class we are currently studying the book of 1 Peter. We ran across this passage recently: **“As you come to him the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, you also, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, in order to bring spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God.”** In many ways that section says the very same thing we are talking about here. Jesus, the Living Stone, is rejected by men but chosen of God and precious. Because of what Jesus has accomplished for us, we are also then living stones. We become the house of God, the spiritual priesthood serving God in wonderful ways. That’s the cross. It is our opportunity to be imitators of Jesus and to use that imitation to the glory of God. Yes, bearing the cross, even though thrust upon us by the world in hatred, is still a wonderful and spiritual way to serve our God and Lord.

One other quick thought on the cross of Jesus. We are talking about bearing it. Don’t confuse bearing the cross with Jesus dying on the cross. You and I don’t have our cross because that is how we must earn our way to heaven. We carry our cross, endure the humiliation and hardships of this world because of what Jesus ultimately did on the cross. Note the subtle shift there. There is a difference between carrying the cross and being hung on the cross! We carry the cross because Jesus was hung on the cross. Jesus is the one who suffered the wrath and agony of eternal hell to grant us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus hung on that cross to be the atoning sacrifice for sin. Nowhere are we called upon to be such a thing. Jesus has won eternal life and salvation for all of mankind. Jesus died on the cross, died to sin, died for our sake so that we would never have to endure the hell our sins deserve. Only one had to be on the cross and that was Jesus.

Think of this. If you keep everything straight, you will grasp that the cross Jesus hung on has now become the cross we hope on. Because of what that cross of Jesus is about: His paying for our eternal damnation and because Jesus was raised from the death the cross brought him, we are now filled with hope. The hope of eternal life and salvation. That hope, that sure and certain confidence in God’s promises of love, grace, forgiveness and mercy is ours. We have all of those things because Jesus hung on the cross. So recognize that bearing the cross is because of the hope and salvation that the cross of Jesus has brought to us. Ever think of that? That your cross is about the hope and salvation of Jesus!

Now let’s go on and speak of some of the other nuances that the idea of bearing the cross means. Take verse 26: **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”** I know, that seems rather harsh doesn’t it, yet I think Jesus is making a point. First off, the word we translate as hate has a few other points of meaning. For instance, the word can mean *“disregard, be indifferent to.*” The word used “hebraistically,” that is, as a common figure of speech of the Jewish people, means *“requiring single minded devotion in discipleship, to prefer less, to love less.”* Now understand what Jesus is saying. To be his disciple you are going to have greater love for him and less love for other things. So, love family less than Jesus. Love the things of this world, yes, even your own life, less than you love Jesus. In other words, to be a disciple of Jesus means that Jesus and what he is about is to come first, not second, third or further down the line…Jesus and what he is about is to come first!

The reason why is clear. Being a disciple of Jesus is going to be hard. The world will oppose you and do everything it can to tear you from Jesus. The world, sometimes our very own families, can and do become obstacles in the practice and carrying out of our faith and when we stumble, when we fall under the burden of the cross they have thrust on us...they don’t help, they laugh and make fun because we are so foolish in this Jesus stuff…why you can’t even carry your cross, you foolish Christian! That is the reality of our world.

Jesus is not being harsh. Jesus is making a point. In Sunday Bible class we are looking at the history of Samuel. His mother was childless and she took her desire for children to God, promising God that child would serve him. Along came Samuel and that mother kept her promise to God. I wonder, how many of us have asked God for something…and that something has now become our excuse for ignoring God? Lord, grant me children…but I don’t come to church because it is too hard with children. Or Lord, grant me children but now I don’t come to church because of the kids activities. Lord grant me a job, but now I have a job and I can’t come to church because I must work! Lord, grant me worldly blessings…but I am not in church because I off using those blessings? The point is simple. Is Jesus the very first, the top-most, the most important consideration in your life? Don’t just claim it is true, prove it by how you live your life and by what you are doing? Because in truth, Jesus tells you if He is not number one, you are not his disciple!

It is even a bit more involved. Think of what Jesus says about the tower. Remember, this tower thing is in the context of being a disciple and carrying the cross. Jesus wants us to count the cost, measure things out, to consider every aspect of this endeavor. What is at stake here? If you can’t finish, the world will laugh at and ridicule you. You will be the butt of everyone’s joke! Yet make no mistake, when you act in a way so that the world will ridicule you that means the world also has opportunity to ridicule and laugh at your God, your faith and the wonder of Jesus. That is really what is behind this. Our Lord has already warned us of the hatred of the world because of him, but when we add to their scorn because we are careless or foolish in our faith, in our practice of stewardship and regard for the order of God. This is sad. It has bearing on your discipleship!

Of look at the words about kings and war. Don’t overestimate. Don’t be full of yourself and think you are tougher than you are. If you go to war and lose, you lose everything! But if you with humbleness and humility sue for peace, the outcome can be vastly different. And again, recognize the context here!

I can’t help but think that Jesus was being very clever here. We all tend to think we are kings and queens of our own lives and that everything is in our control. Really? When the Lord God, the true King, the only king, comes to your gates and wants to know if you will join him or fight him, recognize what is at stake. It is about reality. I want you to think of these words with the idea that the king coming against you is the Lord God. It is your opportunity either to join him and live or to oppose him and die. Think of the tremendous implication of these words. And yes, if you think of it in this way, the whole issue of discipleship, of following and being with Jesus is the point.

When it comes to God I send out the peace delegation. At the head of my peace delegation is Jesus Christ, the Kings very own son. Since all that I have is God’s in the first place, why not, in simple humbleness, give to God that which is his? The interesting thing is that the peace delegation often comes back with the message, “Please, continue to live and enjoy my bounty and blessings. But use those bounties and blessings to serve me!”

And that is where verse 33 hits so hard, **“So then, any of you who does not say farewell to all his own possessions cannot be my disciple.”** This world is not it! This life is not the measure of anything except your opportunity to believe and be a child of God. Point well taken, Jesus! You are to be our Everything!

Why did Jesus speak in such a way? Because of the crowds that were following him. They, the vast majority of the crowd, were not there because of faith and confidence that Jesus was their Savior and granter of Eternal life. They were there to be entertained, to be amused, to have something to do, to see miracles and go for the gusto. Jesus was telling them what He was really about. And yes, the majority of those in this crowd were probably that same group who would later shout out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” I want you to know that the verb for crucify is directly related to the word for cross, literally the verb form of the noun cross. What will it be: walk with Jesus or throw Jesus to the cross?

Lord, help us to hear and to follow you with humble hearts knowing our salvation is YOU. Amen.