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Matthew 16:21-28.

Jesus' Cross and Ours

When Jesus teaches His disciples about the cross for the first time, his beloved disciple Peter fiercely resists this. He rebukes Jesus strongly that the cross never happen to him. But Jesus rebukes Peter sternly. V. 23: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." God planned to save human being through the cross of His Only Son Jesus. Anyone who opposes this plan, no matter how much he may be the beloved disciple Peter, will be severely rebuked. Jesus was crucified and died according to God's plan. Through Jesus' obedience, God resurrected Him. And those who believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus will have their souls saved and be given eternal life. All of this amazing salvation was the result of the Son Jesus carrying the cross in obedience to God.

Jesus teaches this after severely rebuking Peter, saying in verses 24-25, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (24). For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." Before Jesus Himself was crucified, He taught His disciples to live a life like His. For to lay down one's life on the cross is to gain life later. The cross of Jesus won a great victory through His resurrection. And He opened the way for anyone to be saved if they believe in Jesus. Jesus also says: Look at verse 26. "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? " Here, 'soul' is translated 'the true life' in the Shinkaiyaku of Japanese Bible. Jesus is saying that even if we live to be 120 years old, rich, honorable, and healthy, if we lose 'our soul, true life,' there is no meaning to our lives at all. Revelation 20:12-15 "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (12). The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done (13). Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of Fire. The Lake of fire is the second death (14). And he whose name is not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (15)." Every human being dies once for his sins. This death is physical death. By the way, the Bible teaches that after this physical death, we face a second death. This death is the "death of the soul. At this time, those not found written in the Book of Life

will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The deciding factor in this fate depends on whether one believes in Jesus Christ or not. The Bible says that those who believe in Jesus Christ have their names written in the book of life.

For some reason, I feel that our churches today do not teach much about this 'salvation of souls'. I feel like churches have somehow gone beyond the "psychological healing" that psychiatry does. But no matter how much trauma is healed, if we die and our souls die, it will all be in vain. That is why God sent His only Son Jesus to die on the cross. Then he resurrected him and won against this terrible death. Those who believe in this Jesus can be saved simply by believing in Him. Jesus is saying that even if we gain the whole world, in this world, if we lose "our soul" we gain nothing. On the other hand, Jesus teaches us that even if we have lost everything in this world through divorce, accident, illness, or unemployment, if we believe in Jesus Christ our souls are saved, this is a great victory in life.

So far, we have been studying the book of Romans every month. The entire book of Romans teaches that we are saved by the grace of Jesus. Romans 1:16-17 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (16). For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed - righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Jesus suffered because He loved us and wanted to give us the life of our souls. We are not ashamed of the cross where this love was demonstrated, are we? Because the cross of Jesus is the power of God to give eternal life to those who believe. For some reason, we tend to think that this message is something we teach children in Sunday school, but the adults here are inevitably getting closer to death. We adults are the ones who must accept and believe this truth like children.

Jesus says at the end of the message, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done (27). Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom(28)." We Christians see Jesus Christ coming with His Kingdom. We will receive eternal life and live forever with our beloved Jesus in His Kingdom. This is what the apostle Peter calls 'living hope' (1 Peter 1:3). Because of this 'living hope,' Christians have persevered in their faith even through the suffering of the world. Peter devoted his life to helping many people gain the soul that Jesus was teaching today. 1 Peter 2:21, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Peter recommends that we Christians are called to live the life of Jesus, who was an example to us. Peter, like Jesus, took up his cross and preached the gospel of Jesus, "the salvation of souls," until his martyrdom. And the other disciples lived the life of Jesus Christ, who also became an example, and many Christians have defended their faith

even to the point of dying on earth for their soul.

As I prepared today's message, I thought and looked. What in the world is "my cross" for me? What is your cross to you? Up to now, my life has been like a war. While I was buried and fretting over the bitterness of my life, I think that I was not carrying my cross. I was so depressed that I could not even serve the church I loved most. I was in deep despair when I thought I had failed in my faith more than I had failed in the world because of my divorce and other problems. I felt useless to God.

By the way, I entered seminary and began learning about what the gospel was. Thankfully the gospel also had the answer I was looking for. It had life. I was made alive by hearing anew the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I was made aware once again of the importance of "soul salvation" that I had heard about when I was little. I was truly moved again by this "grace of salvation" that God had saved my soul, which was to be judged. And as I prayed to God, I realized that I had to forgive my father and my ex-husband. Fortunately, Rie san also advised me to pray for forgiveness by all means, and from this time on I prayed earnestly for forgiveness. Everyone in the church prayed for me a lot, too.

However, it was a difficult thing that I could not carry out. There was still fear in my heart that I could not forgive from my heart. I still had flashbacks, so it was very painful. God was pleased with my faith that I took the plunge into forgiveness, which I started with such mixed feelings.

Last fall I was reunited with my father for the first time in 18 years. Through my father, God clearly showed me that He loves even the offender. It was a wonderful realization that freed me from the bondage of hatred I had felt from my father.

And also, I had not been in contact with my ex-husband, the offender of domestic violence, for 16 years due to safety issues for me and my children. However, when I first contacted him through my attorney, I hoped that my ex-husband had changed a little after all these years. On the contrary, it was a disappointment, no remorse or apology at all, but instead some revenge. I, as well as my children, were deeply hurt by their father.

However, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, my children and I made another effort, and last year they were finally reunited with their father. It was just the same week I received the ordination as a pastor. It was perfect timing. I realized that my ex-husband had not changed, but my children had grown into adults and, most importantly, I had grown up and become stronger. I had become more spiritual and prayerful than before, and was now learning how to live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not by my own strength. And I was gradually realizing in my heart that God was blessing me to reconcile with my ex-husband. I am truly grateful. Thank you all for your prayers.

As I was examining the cross of Jesus to prepare this message, it occurred to me that perhaps the cross of my life is to "forgive". In fact, in this forgiveness, God is doing more wonderful things than I could ever imagine. And I have hope that He will continue to bless me with many more. I believe that God is very pleased with the challenge of obedience to the Word of Jesus. I believe that God will bring forth much fruit in various ways, even though the results of obediently carrying the cross are sometimes painful. I also believe that God will create a "resurrection" in my life that I have not imagined before.

What is "your cross" for you? Our lives are full of suffering even though we believe in Jesus. Suffering that we experience because of our own sins and mistakes. Suffering due to the terrible wrongdoing of others, even though that is hard enough. The suffering of family failures and illnesses. Other suffering comes from society, such as accidents, disasters, wars, and economic crises. These sufferings occur constantly in our lives. However, Jesus says, **Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (29). For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (30)."** Jesus says that "His yoke, our cross," which we are to carry, is light. The cross of Jesus is a heavy, heavy cross that carry the sins of all mankind. It is only the cross of God's Son Jesus Christ. But our cross is light. For Jesus has already triumphed over the world. **John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** Having triumphed over the world on the cross, Jesus gives us peace. The Hebrew word for peace is 'shalom'. Old Testament theologian Perry B. Yoder explains the meaning of shalom in detail in his book 'Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, & Peace' (①) . It means not only peace of mind, but everything for which the heart is at peace. It has a deep and broad meaning, including the abundance of food, clothing, and shelter for our material needs, the restoration of health, the safety of our society without war or crime, and prosperity, and justice. Jesus went through the suffering of the cross to give us this peace.

Now, after his resurrection, Jesus has ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit to give us peace and shalom. The Holy Spirit helps us fully as believers. Whenever we carry our own cross, the Holy Spirit navigates and helps us. Therefore, we can carry our crosses lightly. We thank God for this grace.

We can thankfully bear the yoke of Jesus. I truly believe that Jesus' yoke is light. I have forgiven and I am still in pain sometimes, but my heart is freer and more liberated now compared to when I was bound by hatred. Before I forgave, I felt like I was headed toward

death, but after I forgave, I feel like I am headed toward life.

All the situations that we think we are suffering now become "Jesus' yoke, our own cross" from the moment we are willing to follow Jesus' words in obedience. Forgiving those who have hurt us, challenging seemingly impossible problems with faith, persevering while raising our children, caring for our families with love, and working hard to rehabilitate ourselves with courage are all our crosses. Jesus always gives us "resurrection grace" and abundant restoration and life when we carry our own cross with faith.

Those who want to believe in Jesus today, let us pray in our hearts now. "Jesus, I have been a sinner who did not know you until now. Forgive me. Today I believe in the love of the cross of Jesus. Forgive me for all my sins and give me eternal life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, let us pray together. Beloved Heavenly Father, thank you for the grace of the cross. Because of what Jesus suffered, our souls are saved. We face many problems during our lives, such as illness, relationships, and financial problems, but we who have been saved have already won. Please help us, Holy Spirit, to rejoice in this salvation, to be strengthened in our faith, and to share the "gospel" of grace to as many people as possible. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reference ①

'Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, & Peace',
by Perry B. Yoder, Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1997.