

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 83 – *The Cross – Not to Be Ignored*

By Sharon K. Griffiee

Matthew 16:24-27 (NIV) – *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 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? 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.”*

In these powerful words from Jesus, He makes it crystal clear, the cross is not something to be ignored. Jesus confronts the issue head on; who would choose to forfeit their soul, to gain what the world offers? And what does the world offer? The Apostle John describes its seductive influence;

I John 2:16-17 (NLT) – *“For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.”*

John illustrated in these verses of scripture, the world’s system of values and goals, from which God is entirely *excluded*. This truth is blatantly before us. All one must do is look at what is happening in the world around us, to see that the world is an entity that is *hostile* to God!

The hostility toward Christians has become extreme. For example, some who quote a scripture from the Bible may even be accused of delivering “hate speech”. Why that condemning label? The world’s system of values is in ruthless *competition* with the moral values of Christians. The rivalry is undeniable. That is why you see

the world’s hostility growing stronger and stronger against Christians. The world relentlessly tries to seduce Christians into an ungodly, immoral life style. But many God-fearing Christians are staunchly resisting, standing boldly for Jesus. They know, brothers and sisters, that one cannot love the world *and* the Father at the same time. The Apostle James says it this way, as a word of warning:

James 4:4 (NLT) – *“...Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.”*

People in the world will continue to mock and dismiss the cross as irrelevant, unimportant, ignorantly refusing to consider the sacrifice Jesus made for them. But that is their God-given choice to make. Still, others get the message loud and clear. A woman I had met briefly through a dear friend, was such a person. After sharing about the prison ministry of Christian Ambassadors with her, I was delighted to witness her strong testimony of commitment to Jesus, her Lord and Savior. She said,

“I never realized until just recently, that true Christianity involves much more than just attending church or performing a few religious duties. True Christianity is nothing short of a commitment of one’s total life to Jesus Christ!”

The question that naturally follows a bold statement like hers, is this; what does it mean to totally commit your life to Jesus? Jesus’ own words, as recorded in the Bible, takes all the guess work out of it. In fact, Jesus breaks it down in detail for us, so as not to misunderstand the seriousness of His words. Jesus said,

Matthew 10:37-39 (NLT) – *“If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of*

being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.”

Of course, Jesus’ message will not be received by everyone, because the gospel runs at cross purposes with the values and vision of the world. Jesus warns that those who *cling* to living their life independent of God, is in danger of losing their life. This is a serious matter.

The distressing news awaited us!

Upon returning from a trip, Alan and I received news that our friend, Chaplain Mick Pugsley, was brutally murdered in his Denver home, on October 18, 1998. How could this be? Chaplain Mick had dedicated his life in service to Jesus Christ. He ministered to youth, in and out of the youth offender system, in the state of Colorado. Alan and I were grief stricken to hear that Mick was murdered by a couple of teenagers whom he had tried to help.

The life of a righteous man was taken. For what? For a few material possessions – a car, petty cash, some credit cards – worldly things! For days I woke up in the middle of the night with thoughts of Mick and then thoughts of the troubled youth. The Lord continued to say the same thing to me,

“Sharon, don’t grieve for Mick, grieve for those who refuse the light of Christ when it shines on them.”

God was asking me to grieve for Mick’s murderers! As I listened to the Lord’s instructions, He directed me to the scriptures. Then I saw the righteous Son of God being led to the cross to be crucified.

Luke 23:26-28 (NLT) – *As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. But Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for*

me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

Just as He told me not to grieve for Mick, a righteous man, Jesus told the daughters of Jerusalem not to weep for Him, the righteous Son of God. There is no point in wasting precious time weeping for the righteous, because they already know God. It was for the unrighteous, for those who did not know God, that Christ wept. On His way to Calvary, Jesus stopped and wept over Jerusalem.

Luke 13:34 (NLT) – *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.”*

No, it was not God’s will that Mick, one of God’s messengers, die a violent death. It was God’s will that the troubled youth, Mick tried to help, would come to the light *before* they got caught up in the darkness of this world. It was (is) God’s will that they come to Him and repent, leaving their sins at the foot of the cross. The good news is that Jesus rose from the dead and *is alive* to give eternal life to all those who believe in Him!

John 6:40 (NIV) – *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”*

Questions for Personal or Group Study

Why does friendship with the world make us an enemy of God? James 4:4; I John 2:15; Matt 6:24

Why has hostility toward Christians become so extreme in the world in which we live?

Why does Christianity involve much more than attending Church or performing religious rituals?

What does it mean to totally commit your life to Jesus? See: Matthew 10:37-39

As Jesus was led to the cross, why did He tell the daughters of Jerusalem, “*Don’t weep for Me*”?