

Becoming Friends of the Cross

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READ TEXT: Philippians 3:17-21

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:17-21 NIV)

Introduction:

Parables of the Sower and the Seeds (Luke 8:5)

⁵ "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled on, and the wild birds devoured it. ⁶ Other seed fell on rock, and when it came up, it withered because it had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns, and they grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ But other seed fell on good soil and grew, and it produced a hundred times as much grain."



What if we add to that:

Another sprinkle of seed began to grow. The stalks looked healthy and strong. But when the farmer went to harvest the grain, he found that it was diseased inside and infected other stalks as well.

There is a right way to understand Jesus and His way; and there is a wrong way.

There's an illustration of this contrast in the 1989 movie **Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade** as Indy and his Nazi rivals search for the Holy Grail. They discover a room full of cups of many different kinds, sizes, shapes, and values. The guardian of the Grail tells them that to find the true Grail, they must select a cup and drink from it - only if they select the right cup, will they live. The

Nazi selects the most ornate, beautiful cup he can find and says, **“This certainly is the cup of the King of Kings”**; and he immediately dies.
Indy, on the other hand, selects a humble clay cup: **“the cup of a carpenter.”**
And the Guardian says to him, “You have chosen *wisely.*” (Is it a test? It is!)

TRUE CHRISTIANITY vs SHADOW CHRISTIANITY

Surely, you’ve encountered examples of Shadow Christianity:

- Like the Christian writer who cheated his way onto the NYT bestseller list, he did it to glorify God
- Or the Church Elder who had an affair with a married woman, and told her not to tell anyone lest it ruin God’s ministry through him
- Or the preacher who asked his church to buy him a 86-million dollar private jet to do ministry
- These are counterfeit versions of Christianity, not the real thing**

Being led down the wrong path of faith, even in the name of Jesus, can happen too easily

In Davidson, NC, in 2013 a church commissioned a statue of JESUS, depicted as a homeless person lying on a bench. One person who saw the sculpture was very offended and complained to the local press, “We need someone who is capable of meeting our needs, not someone who is also needy.” Another local resident complained on the news saying that it might attract riff-raff to his safe neighborhood.



Who was Jesus, and what was Jesus all about?

Big Idea: “Friends of the Cross”

*Why the cross? Wasn’t the cross bad? Wasn’t it a punishment designed to degrade and humiliate criminals? Crucifixion was a public execution meant to instill fear in the rest of the populace. And yet Jesus used this event as proof of His sacrificial love. He turned shame into honor. Christians **redeemed** the cross into a symbol of Jesus. A cross necklace is not just a memory of His death, but a reminder of His **whole way of life** - a way of*

life we're called to remember. Every time we participate in communion, the **Eucharist**, we *Do this in remembrance of me*.

You've been studying the messages in the book of Philippians:

Chapter 1: Re-imagining Paul's imprisonment:

Chapter 2: Follow Christ's example: *How LOW can you go?* -Go and do likewise!

These are **good examples**.

Chapter 3 turns a corner and highlights **bad examples**: evil workers, mutilators of flesh, Christians that don't understand Christ, Believers that don't have faith, Worshipers that are actually idolaters. These are malformed Christians. They are Enemies of the cross.

Instead, Paul is inviting believers to be *friends of the cross*, to adopt the mindset and lifestyle of the Jesus who did not despise the cross, but met the fate of the cross out of obedience to God and love for sinners.

BUT HOW DO WE BECOME FRIENDS OF THE CROSS?

Friends of the Cross Value Humility

The enemies of the cross look to build a personal empire as a monument to their own glory, status, power, prestige, and wealth. Jesus could have done this: in tempting Jesus, Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glories. Jesus said *NO*.

Instead, Jesus humbled himself. As it says in Philippians 2:3-4: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.*

The cross destroys pompous prestige, selfish popularity, and ugly power, replacing them with care for the other. One good definition of humility is *getting out of the way to put someone else in the spotlight*

The cross was meant to ruin the reputation of its victims and empty them of power. Jesus *redeems* but does not *remove* this function of the cross

Friends of the Cross Look Beyond the External to the Heart

Paul had an impressive boasting list that checked off the list of the *perfect* religious person. But he rejected all of that because he knew that while mortals look at the outside, God looks inward.

The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Philippians 3:19 says enemies of the Cross have an *earthly* mindset: they only see with their eyes – like the people who were offended by the homeless Jesus statue. We need to learn to see with CROSS-LENSES – eyes that look at deeper truths.

What do King David, Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins, and Jesus have in common? *They are more than meets the eye (unlikely heroes)!*

To see with these cross-lenses, you can't just add a new value, like going to church or tithing. You have to re-evaluate *all things* in your life, and the way you look at life.

The cross forces us to look **DEEPER WITHIN**. As Jesus hung on the cross, between two thieves, one thief saw *just another criminal and said: go to hell*; the other saw the SAVIOR and said: **take me with you to paradise**. WHO DO YOU SEE?

Remember, Isaiah 53 described the Messiah as someone rejected by those who looked on Him. People turned away from the way Jesus looked, rejected him based on appearances alone—Much like a **Hobbit** I might add

Friends of the Cross Live by Hope and Not Instant Gratification

The Gospel is **not** all GOOD NEWS. Our faith **will make us ugly** to the world. In THE MESSAGE, this is how Eugene Peterson paraphrases 2 Corinthians 4:9 — *It seems to me that God has put us who bear his Message on stage in a theater in which no one wants to buy a ticket. We're something everyone stands around and stares at, like an accident in the street. We're the Messiah's misfits.*

But there is GOOD NEWS. We have a **hope** of transformation, redemption, and vindication: *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* (Philippians 3:20-21)

All will be made well: Jesus promises just like He was lifted up after His humiliation, so will we be. We will join his resurrection party. Rejection by the world is *not* the last word.

Enemies of the Cross live for: “instant gratification”

- The glutton wants food now, the drunkard wants a shot
- The greedy want a quick buck
- The Youtube star wants new followers today

Their god is their belly (seat of primal appetites)

We Friends of the cross take the long view: We give up all worldly credit and empty our pockets for Jesus (lose all things).

For what? A PROMISE? Matthew tells the parable of the **pearl of great price:** A Man knows of a treasure hidden in a field and sells EVERYTHING to buy that field. What a fool! Imagine that moment when he sold everything, but before he bought the field. HE HAS NOTHING. In a way, that's us!

FRIENDS OF THE CROSS

- 1) Value Humility**
- 2) Look Beyond the External to the Heart**
- 3) Live by Hope and Not Instant Gratification (Belly-worshippers)**

PRACTICAL MOMENT: GETTING REAL

Take a moment, get a pen & paper, and write down 5 LIFE GOALS.

Now, ask yourself if they pass the Friend of the Cross test?

- (1) Does this goal focus on improving the life of others? (Humility)
- (2) Does this goal focus on substance over image? (Beyond Externalism)
- (3) Does this goal lean into a kingdom hope? OR does it *just make me feel good?* (Hope)

TIME TO WRAP UP

Let's look at the Friend of the Cross lessons highlighted in the old hymn, *When I Survey the Wond'rous Cross:*

1. When I survey the wond'rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory dy'd,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,

And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

Theme: “wondrous cross” – What an oxymoron! If I am drawn to the cross, I have to rethink all things and “pour contempt on all my pride.”

2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the Death of Christ my God:
All the vain Things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his Blood.

Theme: All the vain things that charm me and I have to crucify them.

3. See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

Theme: Thorns a crown: His suffering love reveals His glory.
Becoming a Friend of the Cross is not fun! Sorrow and love are hard!

4. His dying Crimson, like a Robe,
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree;
Then am I dead to all the Globe,
And all the Globe is dead to me.

Theme: Jesus' Blood is a royal robe, wow! I am dead with Him. Dead to all the globe. ONE PERSON SEES A FAILURE, ANOTHER A VICTOR.

5. Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.

Theme: We must be All In.

Ask yourself:

Are you an **enemy** of the cross? Worshipping vanity and pride?

Are you a **stranger** to the cross? Wanting to be “religious,” but keeping your distance from getting too caught up in the Jesus stuff?

Are you a **fan** of the cross? Love the singing. Love the potlucks and entertainment. Maybe even appreciative of what Christians have to offer to the world, but “non-committal”?

Are you a **friend** of the cross? Willing to be “implicated” in all the messiness of the cross of Christ, in faith, hope, and love?