

# WEEK TWO: DEVOTIONAL READING

The key questions that stand before us are, “What exactly is the cross that the follower of Jesus is called to carry?” We know what the cross of Christ achieved: The propitiation of our sins. “What do our crosses accomplish, however, within God’s plan?”

Please remember that Jesus does not call us to carry *His* cross. He calls each of us to bend over and pick up our own cross and follow Him.

## The Meaning of the Cross

What is worth noting is that the call here is not simply an exhortation for the disciple to be prepared for death by crucifixion. Cross-bearing is presented as being indicative of the level of life-commitment that will be necessary to be a follower of Jesus.

The first-century Greek philosopher Plutarch wrote that “every criminal who is executed carries his own cross.” Unfortunately, I suspect the sense that the early church had of this saying is largely lost on us today. The “cross” of the believer has been trivialized into meaning pretty much anything that is unpleasant. But this is not the meaning that Jesus had when He said these words!

The “cross” does not consist of ordinary human troubles and sorrows such as disappointments, disease, death, poverty and the like.<sup>1</sup> If they are going to follow Him, Jesus told the disciples they must deny themselves – renouncing their right to life – take up their cross and follow Him on the same path to death. They must be prepared every day to face death in their allegiance to their Master, after His example. Even more than that, they must throw themselves into the purposes of God to such an extent that sacrifice at any level becomes the accepted norm. This is the cost of following Christ.

In order to build His church (Matthew 16:18), Christ’s death was necessary, as He points out in Matthew 16:21. This is the foundation. Without His death, there is no redeemed community. But just as Christ’s cross was needed to establish His church, our crosses are needed to build His church. In order to accomplish Jesus’ plan to build His church, both crosses are needed.

There is no better way to put it than to follow the lead of Josef Ton: “Christ’s cross was for *propitiation*. Our cross is for *propagation*.”<sup>2</sup>

By Glenn Penner, author of *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2004), pp. 135-137.

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<sup>1</sup> L. W. Hurtado, “Jesus’ Death as Paradigmatic in the New Testament.” Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Society for Systematic Theology, April 7-10, 2003: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ton: 90.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1:

*Acts 9:10. "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.'"*

*What are the implications of Ananias being sent to lay his hands on Saul for healing?*

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2:

*Acts 9:15. "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name....'"*

*What does bearing the name of the One who was crucified mean to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #3:

Richard John Neuhaus wrote in *Death on a Friday Afternoon*:

*"We will die anyway. The question is whether we will die senselessly or as companions and coworkers of the crucified and risen Lord."*

*How will we choose to live and to die in the light of this reality?*