

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz production
Week 26

Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

While prophesying of His own death and resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples: “If any *man* will come after me, let him **deny** himself, and take up his **cross**, and **follow me**.” (Matt 16:24)

A phrase extended not only for the ears and hearts of His disciples then, but also for us today. As we study the Savior's death this week, as He is crucified by His own people I hope that we will come to understand what this phrase means to us personally.

An interesting note to point out is that the Jews (their laws and culture) did not include the practice of execution by way of a cross. In the Jewish law if someone was found guilty of blasphemy as they accused Jesus of, the punishment was stoning. So how did He end up dying on a cross?

“In antiquity crucifixion was considered one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death. Probably originating with the Assyrians and Babylonians, it was used systematically by the Persians in the 6th century BC. Alexander the Great brought it from there to the eastern Mediterranean countries in the 4th century BC, and the Phoenicians introduced it to Rome in the 3rd century BC. It was virtually never used in pre-Hellenic Greece. The Romans perfected crucifixion for 500 years until it was abolished by Constantine I in the 4th century AD. Crucifixion in Roman times was applied mostly to slaves, disgraced soldiers, Christians and foreigners—only very rarely to Roman citizens”

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14750495/>

After being betrayed by Judas Jesus was brought before the Roman government to be judged. The problem was that Jesus did nothing wrong against the Roman law. He did nothing wrong against the Jewish law either, but He was a threat to the Pharisees and the Sadducees of that day, because Jesus, without much effort, would point out their evil ways.

President Holland explained the chain of events this way: “He was arraigned before the Israelite leaders of the day—first Annas, the former high priest, then Caiaphas, the current high priest. In their rush to judgment these men and their councils declared their verdict quickly and angrily. “What further need have we of witnesses?” they cried. “He is [worthy] of death.”²

With that He was brought before the gentile rulers in the land. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, interrogated Him once, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea, did so twice, the second time declaring to the crowd, “I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man.”³ Then, in an act as unconscionable as it was illogical, Pilate “scourged Jesus, [and] delivered him to be crucified.”⁴ Pilate’s freshly washed hands could not have been more stained or more unclean.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/04/none-were-wit-h-him?lang=eng>

These same people that hailed Him as their King as He rode into Jerusalem on palm Sunday less than one week earlier, turned against Jesus and called for His crucifixion. In fear, Pilate conceded to their demands. Thus condemning Jesus to death in Roman fashion to die by way of a Cross.

As we consider these few brutal days at the end of the Savior’s ministry it seems like one painful event after another. From the agony of Gethsemane to betrayal by a very close friend, to being falsely accused, beaten, tortured, humiliated, then killed. Any one of those things alone would devastate or ruin us for years. And He endured it all in the span of a few days. These 3 main events are all linked. They are connected in the role of the atonement. Jesus’s mission to save us from our sins was not isolated to the Garden of Gethsemane or to just the cross. The atonement of Jesus Christ was fulfilled or completed with the Garden, the Cross and the empty tomb. All three combined consist of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. If any one of them was left out or withheld from God, our salvation would have been frustrated and we would all be doomed to judgments of condemnation.

This was all prophesied. Predicted to happen just the way it did:

Isaiah said: Surely he hath **borne** our **griefs**, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* **wounded** for our **transgressions**, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his **stripes** we are **healed**. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Even and especially Jesus knew how this was all supposed to happen. AND HE DID IT ANYWAYS!

This adds so much meaning to His commission to us to take up our cross and follow Him. I think that some of us believe that because Jesus suffered and endured great pain and sorrow

that we for some reason don't have to, or we are exempt from it because Jesus did it. This belief is not in alignment with what the Savior taught. Our comfort in enduring some pain and agony is that Jesus felt all of it and knows what we are going through. He is walking right beside us as we carry our cross. And at times He will carry it for us if the burden becomes too much to bear.

I will share with you a time in my life when this was the case.

17 years ago my wife and I were very excited to be pregnant with our second child. Early on we received the devastating news that there was a problem. Our son had a blockage in his digestive system which was not allowing the amniotic fluid to circulate and develop his lungs and vital organs. Luckily technology was advancing and there was a new surgery that would allow the doctor to go in and place a shunt in his belly as a temporary fix and once he was born another surgery would easily correct the blockage. We agreed and everything went perfectly. It was a miracle. Disaster avoided. Or so we thought.

A week later we went back to the hospital for a check up to make sure everything was still good. As we arrived at the hospital my wife got out of the car and suddenly her water broke. Literally as she was standing at the door of the hospital. They rushed her in and found that during the surgery she had contracted a staph infection which sent her into labor.

We were having a baby. It was still very early. She was only 22 weeks along. The doctor came into the room and informed us that it was too early. The baby's lungs and organs had not developed far enough to sustain life. And they were not going to try and help our son once he was born.

You what? We responded. You're not going to do anything to help him? We were devastated. How could this be happening? How could God send this beautiful child into the world and not let him live? What were we supposed to do? We argued and fought, we begged and pleaded for them to do something, anything.

We prayed so hard for a miracle. For God to intervene and save this child.

During all this commotion and panic. Our perfect little son Matthew was born. He weighed only 11 ounces. He fit in the palm of my hand. Perfect little face, tiny hands, He was an angel. He lived for about an hour and then he passed away peacefully. During that hour we were able to give him a name and a blessing. We held him, kissed him, we cried and prayed. That was a heavy cross. During that hour and several times of despair after that Jesus carried that cross for us. We could feel the weight, the pain, the sorrow. Then at the moment when it would start to feel the heaviest there was help. As if He was there lifting it for us. We would feel Him saying. I know it's heavy. I know how you are feeling. Let me take this for a moment so you have my rest, my peace. I'm grateful for those moments.

Over time I can still feel the weight, but one thing I have noticed. It's not so heavy any more. Not that it has become lighter but that I have become stronger. And isn't that the purpose of the cross. Jesus didn't suffer, die and rise again so that you can have a perfect painless life. Never once did he teach that or even imply that was the plan. In fact the exact opposite was preached.

Listen closely to the teaching of president Holland:

“This speaks of the crosses we bear rather than the ones we wear. To be a follower of Jesus Christ, one must sometimes carry a burden—your own or someone else’s—and go where sacrifice is required and suffering is inevitable. A true Christian cannot follow the Master only in those matters with which he or she agrees. *No*. We follow Him everywhere, including, if necessary, into arenas filled with tears and trouble, where sometimes we may stand very much alone.

To Araunah, who attempted to give him free oxen and free wood for his burnt offering, King David said, “Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: ... [for I] will [not] offer ... unto the Lord my God ... that which doth cost me nothing.”¹² So too say we all.

As we take up our crosses and follow Him, it would be tragic indeed if the weight of our challenges did not make us more empathetic for and more attentive to the burdens being carried by others. It is one of the most powerful paradoxes of the Crucifixion that the arms of the Savior were stretched wide open and then nailed there, unwittingly but accurately portraying that every man, woman, and child in the entire human family is not only welcome but invited into His redeeming, exalting embrace.¹³

As the glorious Resurrection followed the agonizing Crucifixion, so blessings of every kind are poured out on those who are willing, as the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob says, to “believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross.” Sometimes these blessings come soon and sometimes they come later, but the marvelous conclusion to our personal *via dolorosa*¹⁴ is the promise from the Master Himself that they do and

will come. To obtain such blessings, may we follow Him—unfailingly, never faltering nor fleeing, never flinching at the task, not when our crosses may be heavy and not when, for a time, the path may grow dark. For your strength, your loyalty, and your love, I give deep personal thanks. This day I bear apostolic witness of Him who was “lifted up”¹⁵ and of the eternal blessings He bestows to those “lifted up” with Him, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/10/41holland?lang=eng>