

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS #1

“The Doorway To Discipleship”

I. A Very Personal Message

A. How God Has Been Dealing With My Life

1. Several months ago, I really the Lord directed me to re-read **“The Release Of The Spirit”, a book by the great Chinese missionary Watchman Nee.**

a. The cover says: This book “stresses one basic lesson that every servant of God must learn; that any measure of fruitfulness requires the breaking of the outward man to allow...THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT.”

b. The book compares the release of the Spirit of God into the world to the release of the life within a seed, which cannot take place until the outer shell is broken.

“Our spirit seems to be wrapped in a covering so that it cannot easily break forth. The problem is not how to obtain life but how to allow this life to come forth.”

Watchman Nee, The Release Of The Spirit

2. The great proof text is something Jesus said in John 12, hours before He would go to the Cross:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12:23-24 NASB

3. Every Bible scholar knows Jesus was talking about going to the Cross.

a. He was saying that the resurrection life in Him could not be released unless He was willing to die and fall into the earth.

4. But He didn't stop there. In the next verse He moves on from talking about *His* cross to talking about *our* cross.

"He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me..."

John 12:25 NASB

5. Here we have the “doorway to discipleship”; the invitation to follow the Jesus model; that the release of resurrection life cannot occur until we’re willing to die to our “self” life.

“The Lord shows us here that the outer shell is our own (selfish) life while the life within us is the eternal life He has given us. To allow the inner life to come forth, the outer life must be lost.”

Watchman Nee, The Release Of The Spirit

6. Once we understand that that we can’t release resurrection life until we’re willing to die to our selfishness, we come to the famous “Pogo” moment...

POGO CARTOON

“We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

a. You know you are moving toward spiritual maturity when you realize that the enemy of resurrection life is a selfish life...

“Anyone who serves God, will discover sooner or later, that the great hindrance to the work is not others, but himself.”

Watchman Nee, The Release Of The Spirit

7. The great hindrance to the release of the Spirit today is not the devil; nor the world; it’s a Church that turns inward and avoids the shadow of the Cross to fall on our selfishness.

8. It’s time to reconsider the Cross...

B. The Most Important Event In Human History

1. Even a baby believer knows that Jesus died for our sins on the Cross.

a. This was a fulfilment of the Angel’s prophecy to Joseph about Mary’s child...

...she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21

2. We know a lot about HIS cross; but Jesus talked a lot about OUR cross!
 - a. How many sermons have we heard on being born again? But Jesus only mentioned it once.
 - b. How many sermons have we heard that “God is love”? But that’s only mentioned once in the entire New Testament.
 - c. But how many sermons have we heard about Jesus’ call to “take up our cross and follow Him”, which He said 6 times?

“Six times in the Gospels our Lord refers to His followers taking up a cross. It was one of His favorite illustrations of the principle of self-denial.”

Walter Chantry

C. What Is Self-Denial?

1. I think it will help us to make a difference between “self-denial” and denial of “self”.
2. Down through history, when the church has preached on self-denial, it led to all kinds of weird practices:
 - a. **The monks in medieval times would beat themselves with whips**
 - b. Others would pierce themselves
 - c. Martin Luther sought to humble himself by crawling on his hands and knees up the up the 28 marble steps of the Scala Sancta in Rome...supposedly the steps Jesus climbed in Jerusalem to meet Pontius Pilate.
 - d. But all these acts of humiliating the flesh are NOT what Jesus meant!
3. In the Gospels, Jesus clearly explains what it means:

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.

Mark 8:34-35

4. The life we really want is on the other side of a Cross we never talk about!

a. Trying to experience the fullness of the Christian life without turning away from our selfishness is like expecting an oak tree to grow out of an acorn that has the outer shell intact.

5. When the Apostle Paul preached this truth to the Corinthian church, they thought he was crazy.

13 If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. 14 Either way, Christ's love controls us.* Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.* 15 He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

2 Corinthians 5:13-15 NLT

a. He not only died for our sins; He also died to deal with our selfishness. Or, we might say it this way...

JESUS DIED TO DELIVER ME FROM MY SINS; BUT HE ALSO DIED TO DELIVER ME FROM MY 'SELF'!

D. What Is "Self"?

1. The New Testament refers to "self" as the flesh; the old man; it's the part of me that was not immediately affected when I was born again.

a. If we are born again we have the treasure of the living Christ within us....

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels...

2 Corinthians 4:7

(the "earthen vessel is the 'self'")

2. Self is the part of me that puts ME on the throne of my life.

a. It causes me to put myself at the center; it says...

"It's all about me!"

3. Self is “selfishness”. And it’s easy to see it in other people!

a. We see it when someone zips into parking place you were about to turn in to

b. We see it in our children fighting over a toy or a piece of candy

c. Pastors see it in the church when they can’t find people to serve or make commitments

4. Seeing selfishness in others doesn’t change us. But there’s something about seeing selfishness in *ourselves* that helps us understand why we feel disappointment with our life as believers.

“We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves.”

Pastor David Platt

5. Until we see the selfish life is our enemy, we won’t be willing to let go of it.

The Monkey That Won’t Let Go

***They trap monkeys in the tropics by boring out coconuts and putting rice inside. The monkey’s hand is small enough to go into the coconut hole. But when they make a fist to clutch onto the rice, they can’t get their hand out and because they can’t run away, they’re easily captured. The monkey doesn’t realize that handful of rice he’s holding on to is going to cost him his freedom. So why do WE hold on so hard to the self-life and make a monkey of ourselves?**

a. Jesus said if we LOSE our life, we’ll find it.

6. The message of denial of self is not popular in American culture.

a. We live in the most prosperous country on earth and it’s easy to get caught up in the pursuit of pleasure.

7. It’s popular to preach prosperity but not to preach a personal cross: as one popular televangelist says...

“Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is from Satan.”

Paula White

(But Jesus said it 6 times)

7. We know the message makes us uncomfortable; letting go of self-centered living feels a little like dying; but Jesus said it is the only way to experience resurrection life.

8. **This is the key to “closing the gap” in our walk with God between where we are and where we want to be.**

II. Closing The Gap

A. Living In The Shadow Of The Cross

Denying The Self Is The Beginning Of Life

1. Jesus is our model; He sets the pattern...

a. “If I fall into the ground and die, I’ll bring forth much fruit” (John 12:24); so when we die to the self we bring forth the fruit of the Spirit

b. Paul tells us that when Jesus humbled Himself unto death, God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:5-9); so when we put our selfish life to death God will give us a spiritual promotion

c. Hebrews 2 tells us, “for the joy set before Him” He endured the Cross. (Hebrews 12:2); so every cross we bear has joy on the other side.

2. In every case, death to self brings forth greater life in Christ.

a. Give...you will receive.

b. Sow...reap!

c. Die...and you will life!

“All the great spiritual delights we long for come into our Christian experience through the birth pangs of self-denial.”

Walter Chantry, Shadow Of The Cross

B. Close: The Good News is that the work is already done.

1. Nobody can crucify themselves. God has done it for us!

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

2. If you're in Christ, you're old self is already dead!

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:2-3

3. Sin won't really work for you because you have already died to it.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:1-2

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

4. If we really belong to God, sin is not natural; nor is selfishness; that's why it doesn't work for us.

5. The most liberating thing in life is to find out...

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

a. It's time to put away that demanding tyrant called "self".

6. It's time to turn from self-love to loving others...which is our real life!

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.

1 John 3:14