

## **Shine!**

Graduation Message 5-21-05

Congratulations! Well done! How many hours of classes and homework did you put in to earn this diploma? But here at Cornerstone, that is just a part of your preparation for the life that lies before you. Life has been going on while you were here. You've been walking with the Lord through this time, sometimes cooperating with His Spirit, and sometimes rebelling against Him. But through it all you have been learning, learning about walking with the Lord, learning the consequences of ignoring the Holy Spirit, learning the blessings of cooperating with the Spirit. That, more than anything else you have learned, will help to guide you through the years that are in front of you.

As a Pastor who counsels people and sees the intimate goings on in lives, this is the one thing that I plead with you to understand, your occupation, your status in society, your so-called success, even who you choose to marry, will affect your life to only a small degree compared to your walk with the Lord. The reason He calls you to love Him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength is because He loves you. It is the very best thing for you. It is the richest, fullest, most meaningful life and that is just the beginning. Then you have the wonder of heaven as well. Your walk with the Lord will shape your marriage relationship, your attitude and effectiveness in the work world, and ultimately your entire life.

I've watched many lives go the way of the old nature. So many believers in Jesus try to straddle the fence of living for self and living for God. Jesus said it can't be done. He told His disciples, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*<sup>25</sup> *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*<sup>26</sup> *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?* Matthew 16:24-26 (NIV)

He used the same word "deny" when he predicted the betrayal of Peter. Do you recall how Peter lost it the third time someone asked if he was Jesus' disciple? That is the kind of denial of self that Jesus is referring to. It is that kind of utterly denying your selfish desires and preferences to let Christ reign in you.

When He said to take up your cross, He wasn't talking about some little burden or difficulty. It meant to consider your life over. When a Roman official declared someone guilty and punishable by crucifixion, the soldiers strapped the cross beam to their shoulders. All that was left was a slow agonizing march to the place of execution, and then a long and excruciatingly painful torture to the death. Take up your cross wasn't for those who were just looking for a fulfilling life. It wasn't just for someone who wanted to be spiritual and have a free pass to heaven. It was for those who really wanted to follow Jesus and be a slave of the One who gave them life and forgiveness and made them right with God. This isn't 60%

Christianity, or even 90%, it is 100%! It is the recognition that you need a Savior and He is worth following no matter what the cost.

In graduation ceremonies all around the nation, you can hear speakers telling you to make something of yourself. Jesus is telling you to make nothing of yourself and everything of Him. Don't get me wrong, I'm not telling you to be a bum. In fact, you should be the very best example at whatever field you choose. If you are going to be housewife, you should do it as unto the Lord, and be a Proverbs 31 mother and wife. If you are going to be a paramedic, be Jesus to that emergency response team. If you are going to be a merchant, be a fair and caring one that represents Christ in the marketplace. Whatever career or means of provision that God guides you into, represent Christ in that arena. What that means is less of selfish ol' you and more of Jesus in you.

It is in this place of death to self that you find life. Jesus was saying that you can try to cling to your life, but that is the certain way of losing it. Look around you. You have seen them. Some are probably even in your church. They wanted to be spiritual but they couldn't let go of their desires to be rich, or famous, or at least influential, or just plain enjoyment of worldliness, and they have lost their life. Sad people, torn between two worlds, neither their flesh nor their spirit are satisfied.

But I hope you have also seen those who have utterly denied themselves. They have found life. When you talk to them there is glow in their eyes. The wisdom they share with you is from above. It is Christ expressed in their selflessness. There is a peace and joy about them that is priceless. They have found life. They took up the cross, and Christ began to be manifested in their lives. They bring something of the glory of God with them into life's encounters. Their presence makes a worship service more worshipful. They add a joy and sanctity to their place of employment.

When Jesus spoke those words about denial of self and taking the cross, Peter had just tried to influence Him to forsake God's plan and the suffering. When Jesus said betrayal, abuse, and murder lay before Him, Peter said, "Never Lord! This shall never happen to You!" Peter loves Jesus. You don't want people you love to suffer, because you suffer with them. But what if the suffering is going to produce something of great value, like the salvation of the world? Jesus told Peter he had in mind the things of men and not the things of God. Amazing isn't it. One minute we can receive a revelation from God and the next be the voice of evil. It hinges on what we have a taste for, what we care about (NCV). What we put first is going to influence what we say and do. What we put first can make us a spokesperson for God or for Satan.

This is when Jesus said the equivalent of this, "Listen, if you want to follow me, you have to die to thinking about yourself all the time. In fact, consider your life over. Then you are going to find what it really means to live, not a self-centered life, but a Christ-centered life. That is why the Apostle Paul could say, "It is no

longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me." That is when you represent Christ in whatever field of work God directs you. That will cause you to stand out as different!

Nearly 100 years ago, Charles Cowman was one of the youngest men ever to be hired as a telegraph operator. He was just living to please himself until one day he went to a revival meeting. He fought hard not to go down the aisle, but once he was back home, he could resist no longer and knelt on the floor of the entryway to his home and surrendered to Christ. He wanted to share what had happened at his work without slacking off, so he watched for every opportunity to share Christ. Without neglecting his work in any way, over a period of six months he led 75 of his co-workers to Christ. He is quoted as saying, "We must be crucified men to proclaim a crucified Lord." He became a missionary that had a powerful impact on Japan, Korea and China.

The Lord's challenge to you is this, will you live a crucified life? Will you lose your life to really find it, or just live like the rest of the selfish masses whose life is summed up with a garage sale? When the race is over will you hear God's, "Well done good and faithful servant? Will your presence bring the presence of Christ to your family, your work, your church, and even your leisure?

Let me pass on to you the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians 2:15-16 (MSG) <sup>15-16</sup> Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns. You'll be living proof that I (Cornerstone, your church, your parents) didn't go to all this work for nothing. SHINE!