WE FOLLOW A CRUCIFIED LORD

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The lie creeps in when we start to believe that because we received salvation, then everything will be plain sailing from there on in. The road to heaven will be paved with happiness, peace and prosperity. This is a dreadful lie, but the materialism and comfort of the Western world in our generation has made it a plausible lie.
Category: Christian Life

Yesterday, I was musing on what I should write for today's blog post. I decided that it would be good to do something to represent the crucifixion of Jesus. Perhaps I could post a song backed by some tasteful artwork, or maybe one of those pictures with a Bible verse set against a picture of a cross at sunset. In the end, inspiration didn't strike and after five or ten minutes I went back to my email.

At the same time as I was browsing backlit photographs of crosses and listening to old songs about the cross, five gunmen were stalking the corridors of a Kenyan university hall of residence and brutally murdering those who were not Muslims.

Jesus death wasn't an artistically arranged event. There was blood, pain, nakedness and shame. There were crowds baying for the death of the criminals. There were brutal soldiers, cold and clinical in the mechanics of execution. And there was loneliness; loneliness deeper than the dawn of time. A loneliness surpassing, but perhaps not unlike, the desperation of a young Kenyan Christian with an AK47 pointed to his head saying that he is a Christian, knowing full well what will happen next.

Before you accuse me of blasphemy for equating the murder of students in East Africa with the death of Son of God at Calvary; let's reflect a little on what Scripture says.

When Jesus talked about the cross in the Gospels, he didn't refer to his coming crucifixion; the cross he talked about was ours.

> *If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. (Matthew 10:38)*
>
> *Then he said to the crowd, â€œIf any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways,takeÂ upÂ yourÂ cross daily, and follow me.(Luke 9;23)*

Jesus calls us to radical discipleship; to be prepared to give up everything for him. Even our lives. Taking up our cross for Jesus is not about putting up with life's discomforts, it is about a lifestyle which gives everything over to Jesus. That is something that is easy to sing about in worship songs, but somewhat harder to live out.

Paul takes things a bit further.

> *Â I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. (Colossians 1:24)*

Commentators argue about the precise understanding of this verse, but the central thrust is clear. When we suffer for the gospel, we are, in some way, sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. That isn't to say that Jesus sufferings were not enough to save us or that our own sufferings add to our salvation,

but there is a link.

All too often, Evangelical Christians have bought into a lie. We believe that Jesus died for us, that he paid the price for our redemption and that through him we can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life. So far, that is all good and true. The lie creeps in when we start to believe that because we received salvation, then everything will be plain sailing from there on in. The road to heaven will be paved with happiness, peace and prosperity. This is a dreadful lie, but the materialism and comfort of the Western world in our generation has made it a plausible lie.

However, the experience of the Christians in that Kenyan University shows what a horrible lie this is. The same could be said for believers in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Orissa and a host of other places. Being a Christian is not a safe, comfortable option.

As Paul said:

> *For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. (Philippians 1:29)*

It's a strange sort of privilege, but it is part and parcel of the Christian experience down through the years.

Today we remember the one who:

> *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with GodÂ as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;Â he took the humble position of a slaveÂ and was born as a human being.Â When he appeared in human form,Â he humbled himself in obedience to GodÂ and died a criminalâ€™s death on a cross.(Philippians 2:6-8)*

But let us spare a thought for those who, in obedience to their crucified Lord are taking up their own crosses and laying down their lives for his name. The world is not worthy.

I will return to this theme over the next week or so.