

“If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it”. Luke 9:23,24

HE MEANS WHAT HE SAID

by Craig Marlatt

Have you ever thought about how difficult it must have been for God to bring his glorious truth down to terms which man could understand? When He inspired the great men of old to write what eventually became the Bible it must have presented Him with an awesome challenge. It might be compared to a man who wanted to teach ants how to communicate with humans. If a person were to spend his or her entire life with ants, trying to teach them how to understand and communicate on even the lowest of human levels, they would probably not get very far. Well, God is much further from man in character and understanding than we are from the ants, yet He successfully bridged the gap with his Holy Word.

Of all the peoples of history, modern man may indeed be the most difficult to reach with such words as those that Jesus spoke. Today we are living in a highly sophisticated world, and society, especially in the West, does not readily promote self-denial, humility and the taking up, as it were, of one's cross. For us fame, success and personal achievement have been exalted into the highest seat. In many ways even the things which would be called religious in today's world have as their goals self motivation and personal attainment. Indeed we have become so affluent that the words of Jesus can hardly be translated with the same impact with which they were spoken. To us it just doesn't make good sense to follow such a downward path when being upwardly mobile is the obvious means to happiness.

How many of us are ready to hear the words, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on”? We want the best of life and were driven to keep up with the latest trends whether they be designer clothing (or even designer bodies) or the latest craze in healthy eating. But what do you think Jesus meant when He said these things? He meant exactly what he said! That's why He said it. That's simple enough. If our Lord had meant something else He would have said something else.

Often eager young Christians have gone to their pastors or spiritual leaders seeking direction for their lives, wanting to serve God, burning to take the gospel to the lost, even ready to lay down their lives, and have been told, “That's not really what Jesus meant. He doesn't expect you to have to sacrifice like that. He died so that you might have life, and have it more abundantly. He sacrificed so that you wouldn't have to sacrifice. And besides that you haven't even been to seminary! How can you know what the Bible really teaches without going to seminary?”

“You're probably just feeling sorry for those poor people. After all, what good would it do for you to go and minister to them? They probably wouldn't listen. If they were living right they probably wouldn't be in such a miserable condition anyway. It's obvious they've turned their backs on God. Beside all that, what would your parents

think? You don't think God would want you to make them unhappy by going away and getting hurt or something do you? After all, the Bible does say honor your father and mother".

Have you ever heard that before? I have. It makes sense doesn't it? Sure it does... if you listen with the carnal mind. That's why we've had so much trouble understanding the words that Jesus gave us: "*The carnal mind is enmity against God*" (Romans 8:7).

We don't need to modernize the Bible, we need to Bible-ize the modern world. We need to take the great men of God off of our bookshelves, and put them out into the world again. We need to live our lives as they did. Will this generation of ministers find their way onto the bookshelves of tomorrow? Will our grandchildren be able to look back to our days and say, "They were the kind of ministers we need today"?

: Is it possible that our Lord meant exactly what He said? Have we gotten too fat with the things of the world to listen to the words of our Lord Jesus? Does our affluence affect his influence? Yes! Yes! Yes! We need to lose weight (Hebrews 12:1) and shed ourselves of some of the worldly possessions that choke us. We need to make room in our hearts for the words that Jesus spoke. "*For whomsoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels*" (Luke 9:26).

I sense a great stirring in the world. I believe that God is raising up men and women from every walk of life who will be willing to do some risky living to win the lost. Men and women who are not concerned with possessions, but are deeply concerned with possessing the Lord himself.

I challenge anyone who is reading this to believe God for a vision for your own life. You have no higher purpose in this world than to be a vessel for God. He will send you forth if you are willing to go. He will use you if you care enough about the souls of men and women to pay the price. It doesn't take any special talent. All it requires is a willingness to be used. And what's in it for you? The Bible instructs us thus: "*Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins*" (James 5:20).