

Of course you remember the good ole days. Those times when the state of Oklahoma ran a surplus in the budget. Money flowed into the rainy day fund. Departments wondered what they would do with all the extra cash left on hand. Promises were made to cut the state income tax, offer more help to those in need through government assistance programs and agencies, and projections were made of what sustained growth could mean for Oklahoma as a whole. It seemed like a time of unending oil and gas money which buoyed the state economy to new heights. Now, two years later, we face a budget failure for this fiscal year and next year's budget is \$1.3 billion in the hole before it starts. What happened? Didn't anyone see this coming? Didn't anyone expect this?

I know the budget woes of the state weigh heavily on many of your minds. Your jobs might depend on it. Your school likely depends on it. The whole state is on edge. But take your mind off the fiscal problems apparently no one expected. Bring your thoughts to the expectations of a Christian. Those sometimes mirror the expectations of state leaders just two years ago. Everything is going to be great. Growth will continue. Christians think things should go well, should have a good life, even a comparatively easy life. We think Christians should expect only good.

Read the gospel for today and that's not the way Jesus sees it at all. In fact, Jesus comes across as kind of a buzzkill. He's talking real, and it sounds really negative. With so much negativity coming from Jesus it's up to the disciples to say something. How Jesus responds might surprise us, but don't be surprised today or ever. We'll seek to understand what Jesus is talking about when he implies...

**Christians expect crosses  
Our Savior once carried his  
We must keep carrying ours**

Sitting in their living room it was all going so smoothly. They wanted me there even though they knew what I was going to talk about. I couldn't help but smile as I took the invitation and walked them through some basic Bible truths. I'd talk about sin; still okay. I talked about saved only by Jesus; everyone smiles. I asked if they understood; everyone nodded their heads. Now, I wasn't under some grand illusion that I was doing anything. God the Holy Spirit was working through the Word and something fantastic was happening. Faith was being worked, almost right before my eyes. I left that living room feeling awesome about what God had done. The billboard on the drive home brought me back to reality. It's one you probably saw too around town. It said, "Don't believe in God, you're not alone." Ouch.

Peter had just confessed, **"You are the Christ."** These followers of Jesus must have felt pretty good about themselves. Then Jesus started teaching them what that would mean. Their ideas about the Son of Man needed adjustment if they thought following the Son of Man would be all sunshine and rainbows. There was suffering in his future. **"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected...that he must be killed and after three days rise again."** Jesus explained it was necessary for him to suffer, be rejected, and killed. Killed on a cross. In fact it was expected.

Peter tried to stop him. He tried to knock some sense into Jesus; tell him it was wrong to talk so negative. There had to be another way. A Savior and a cross? But Peter was only thinking of himself. What would he miss out on? What kind of power and position would he not get if Jesus was the kind of Savior who suffered? What would he endure if his master endured suffering? None of the disciples understood that Christ expected to carry a cross. For Jesus to be the Savior a cross was necessary. Peter was actually standing in the way. Satan tried standing in the way just last week in the gospel. Tempting Jesus in the desert sounded a lot like Peter tempting Jesus to skip the suffering and go straight for the glory. So Jesus said, **"Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Suffering was the things of God. The Savior would carry a cross and nothing, not even a close friend and disciple, would stop him.

Jesus understood the future. It was all part of the gospel plan to save human beings. He actively stood up to this temptation as he stood up to all temptation without sinning once. He struck down any chance Satan had of getting him off track from his mission. And all this Jesus did while knowing that suffering and mistreatment were coming. Enduring terrible things like betrayal and abuse at the hands of his enemies. Jesus was well aware of the cross and the pain it would inflict. Unimaginable physical pain, not to mention the emotional and spiritual pain. Jesus would let it all happen to him because he saw past the suffering to the resurrection. Victory like that could happen only one way.

Christ expected the cross and died on it willingly. He expected the glory, the victory the cross would bring. He expected it all and by it grants you a place with him. The cross was inescapable for Jesus, true God and true man. He didn't want to escape it, wouldn't escape it. You needed a Savior and the cross would be his crowning moment. His death set the stage for his resurrection. But before that crown came the cross. Before the glory came the suffering. Christ expected his cross and carried it willingly. Christ continues to teach us today that Christians can expect crosses in their own lives. Crosses that we must keep carrying.

As Jesus looked around at disciples who had closely followed him for three years, he may have seen faces of frustration and doubt. They weren't understanding the cross. He continued, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** Jesus hadn't yet carried the cross of wood he would die on. So Jesus couldn't mean his followers would carry actual wooden crosses. There is not a Christian that could carry that cross, survive, and earn forgiveness or achieve salvation. Instead to have a cross as a Christian is to deny self. Self is the sinful nature infecting each individual on earth. Denying that sinful self hurts, because the sinful self fights back. That's where suffering for a Christian comes. Christians expect a cross, expect to deny self.

Think back to the first party you went to in high school or college or the playground from elementary school. No matter where it happened we were undoubtedly confronted with a choice. Do something against the rules or suffer. Take a drink even though underage, pick on someone else, whatever it was it was wrong. As soon as we thought, "This is wrong I shouldn't do this" the sinful nature kicked in. "Oh come on. Have some fun. It won't hurt. No one will know. Why be denied?" If we continued to resist the attacks by the sinful nature increased. Then suffering from outside joined in. Others picked on us. Made fun of us. Denying the sinful nature brought about a cross.

Suffering like that can cause our sinful nature to ramp up its rejection of God and his Word. "Why would you want to not do it? If you take that drink they'll think you're cool and they'll stop making fun. If you join in the picking on someone else, the picking on you will stop. God's causing this suffering by telling you can't do something." That kind of reasoning happens every day, in every single one of our heads. I know because it happens in mine. Suffering will stop if we just go along with the world. We're walking proof of what Jesus said, **"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it."** Reject the suffering, reject the cross, get our way, and we're saving our life here on earth. But eventually we'll lose our life, the one that matters in heaven. No suffering, no cross, no Christian.

Christ carried his cross. Denied himself. He took the cross even when he knew it would mean suffering. Suffering he hadn't earned. Suffering instead you had earned. And you couldn't ask him to take that cross. He did it because of love. Jesus went into the pit of suffering, having all the sins of all the world put on him. There he suffered for you. Out of the pit of suffering he was raised to life. There you have the heights of God's grace. That's the gospel and when you stay in God's Word and close to his sacraments you might be losing your life on this earth, but because of the good news of God you're gaining a new life, a life in heaven. The cross of Christ and his suffering creates a relationship with God and sustains it with forgiveness of sins. Through Christ you stand before God with no fear. He loves you. You have a Savior. He expected and did carry a cross for you.

Now you carry yours. Christian, expect the cross. You will deny yourself. Through Christ you can say no when temptation comes. You can seek to follow Christ at work, in school, at home. Whether on the golf course or in your car. When you face temptations to give in or to skate by. Your cross will mean denying your sinful nature expression. And you'll know when that's happening. Suffering will come. It's the cross. Expect it. But expect something else, grace from God through Christ. Increasing faith for increasing resistance to temptation. Faith in Christ that denies the self sinful expression. Faith in Christ goes back to Christ for motivation and strength. In him you won't be ashamed of suffering. You'll welcome it. You'll rejoice that you suffer because suffering means a cross, and a cross means you're Christian. Embrace the cross. Carry it. Expect it.

I don't know what your personal budgets look like these days. Much depends on if you have a job or not. Lacking money, suffering with little material possessions, general hard times aren't a cross. But if your sinful nature tempts you into thinking life would be easier if you just didn't give to church or you kept more time for yourself, then it becomes a cross. Christ expected a cross as the Savior. Because of Christ's cross your suffering is something else. Christ's suffering sets you free from sin, guilt, and death. You won't face a cross of punishment because Christ rose from the dead. You can expect a cross of suffering when you deny your sinful nature and do what Christ wants. But lose your life for Christ and the sake of the gospel, and you'll be saved for eternity by that gospel.