

Football Face masks. As some of you know, I have been waiting for two months for my Detroit Lions Face mask. I don't know what happened to my order. Meanwhile a couple of you have been torturing me each week by wearing Green Bay Packer Face masks. You can't seem to avoid Packer fans. They are everywhere, even in Florida. Very soon, they tell me the NFL football season is going to start. Even though there might not be fans in the stadiums, at least we will be able to see the games on TV. And this will be the year the Detroit Lions go to the Superbowl.

Have you ever heard about football player named Roy Reagles? He played in the 1929 Rose Bowl Game for the California Golden Bears against the Georgia Tech. The Georgia Tech team fumbled the ball. Roy Reagles picked it up and started running for the end zone, running the wrong way, scoring a 60 yard touchdown for the other team. Throughout his life he carried with him the nickname of "Wrong Way Reagles."

In the words just read to you we find Peter going the wrong way as he tries to convince Jesus not to go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die for our sins on the cross. Wrong Way Peter. Only a short time before Peter made the bold confession, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." Peter the Rock, becomes a soft marshmallow in the hands of Satan as he tries to discourage Jesus from going up to Jerusalem to fulfill his position as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

I wish I can say I have never gone the wrong way or taken my eyes off the cross the way Peter did. But I can't. We boldly confess Jesus one day. Then the next day we find ourselves losing sight of all the blessings Jesus won for us at the cross and with his open tomb. We have opportunities to help other people learn about the blessings of the cross and we find ourselves being silent and ashamed. It is so much easier to talk about the beauty of God's creation, and how he hears our prayers, and how he is with us no matter what happens. The cross? Jesus, please don't ask me to talk about the cross to my kids, or grand children, or friends or neighbors. It is too difficult, too tough and too hard. I speak to myself with these words, "Cheer up Christian it's the cross." Let's see how Jesus joyfully went to the cross for us and how he wants us to joyfully bring the cross to others.

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he had to go to the cross for us. "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Jesus did not hide what he was about to do. In one of the other gospel accounts it says Jesus spoke plainly about his impending death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. It had to be unnerving for the disciples to hear Jesus speak about his impending death with such determination and even joy. The book of Hebrews tells us "for the joy set before him he endured the cross and the shame." In the psalms the Messiah joyfully proclaims, "I have come to do you will O God."

A human example of determination may help us appreciate the determination we see on the face of Jesus. On September 11, 2001 Todd Beamer found himself aboard the high jacked airplane that was heading back to the East Coast. He was able to talk to his wife on the phone through a dispatcher. The last words she heard him say were "Let's roll." There was determination in those final words as they charged the cockpit and caused the plane to crash in Pennsylvania instead of hitting another target in Washington, DC. If you were there listening to

Jesus describe what he was about to do on the cross for us, you would hear a far greater determination and love in his voice as he explained in great specificity what was about to happen.

Peter was taken back by the words of Jesus. The man who confessed Jesus to be the Christ the Son of the living God took Jesus aside and said to him, “Never Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Peter loved Jesus. He could not handle even thinking about him suffering and dying on a cross for the sin of the world. Peter did not see the necessity of the cross the way Jesus did. How did Jesus handle this loving response from Peter? “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’” Jesus speaks to Peter as if he were Satan, because Satan was using the loving words of Peter to tempt Jesus to take his eyes off the cross. That’s still true of those who are offended by the cross of Jesus and think that a suffering savior is overkill. Why, “Just be good!” Isn’t that enough to gain entrance into heaven? Did you notice, however, that Jesus equated “the things of men” with the thoughts of Satan? Whenever someone thinks that he just needs to follow the Golden Rule and “do unto others as he would have them do unto him,” these seemingly pious thoughts cause great delight in hell. You see, Satan’s goal is not to make this world a living hell where murderers and child molesters roam the streets uncontested. He’s quite content to have a world full of law-abiding citizens who mow the lawn for the shut-in down the street and who return dropped \$20 bills instead of pocketing them as long as these people think that by doing these good acts they don’t need the cross of Christ.

Satan never comes to you or me with the bold and defiant statement, “You don’t need what Jesus did for you at the cross.” He is far too clever and subtle for that. He suggests so subtly, “Why don’t you focus on living your Christian life and getting along with people and showing them love and respect and improving your life. Let Jesus help you find the champion inside of you. That is so much better than a cross.” In his book the Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis has an experienced devil telling a younger devil how to destroy Christians by getting them to take their eyes off the cross of Christ.

Jesus saw the need for the cross. He saw the crowds of people and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” I am born into this world wanting to be independent and do my own thing which includes opening up my life to sin. I even think I can save myself by balancing out the sin I have committed with good things that I do. Jesus looked at people. He looked at you and me and followed through with the plan to have all our sin placed on him and paid for at the cross. He did not hesitate to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah that said he would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It has been said that Christianity involves two crosses. The primary cross is the one on which Jesus gave his life for us. The second cross is the one that Christians bear in this life as they are used by Jesus to bring other people to the cross.

Listen to what Jesus says about bearing the cross for him. “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.’” Jesus’ cross was made out of wood but what does your cross look like? Christians often list things like migraines, loneliness, a learning disability, unemployment, family problems, a

bad back... While these are challenges that God allows into our lives, they are not the cross Jesus speaks about here. How does Jesus say a Christian takes up his cross? By denying himself and following him (Matthew 16:24). Here's what that looks like. When your spouse wants to eat Italian but you would prefer Chinese, you deny yourself when you defer to your spouse's choice, not because you have to but because you are delighted that God has given you such an easy way to show love to your spouse! Or your boyfriend wants to move into your house. He says it will be cheaper and you will get to see if you are compatible. But You deny yourself, and say, No, that is not setting a good example to the world or to Jesus.

Denying ourselves is hard because by nature every breath we take is in the hope of accomplishing our will. Take babies for example. They don't learn how to talk so they can complement Mom on how she looks. They learn how to talk so they can communicate more efficiently their needs and get what they want whether food, companionship, or even just a clean diaper. This self-centeredness doesn't end when a baby becomes a toddler. If anything, it gets worse. Ever hear of the "terrible twos"? And as we grow older we simply get better at hiding our self-centeredness and our desire for comfort and ease but we're still always thinking: "If only I had...then I would be happy."

Jesus said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Every year Forbes comes out with its list of the richest people in America. At the top of the list is Jeff Bezos at 186 Billion and second on the list is Bill Gates at 115 billion. Think of what you could buy with that much money, or even more important how you could use that money to help other people. Both Bezos and Gates are doing just that. They have many charitable pursuits. What if you could gain the whole world as Jesus said and use your power and money to make the world a better place. One thing I would do is find a way to feed the thousands of people that are currently suffering in Haiti. No trees on the island, and a dead reef. But is that the best use of my money.

If my whole life was filled with deeds of kindness, I could not erase one single sin I have committed. Only the cross of Jesus can do that for me. If I could make the world a better place to live, and provide people with jobs and feed the hungry children, I would still not be able to keep them from perishing eternally in hell because of their sin. Only the cross of Jesus can provide forgiveness and peace with God. If I was a billionaire, I would be using my money to build churches where a clear message of our Savior Jesus Christ is clearly given. I would be giving generous gifts to World Missions. I would build Christian Day schools, so children would have a Christ-shaped education. Jesus would call me, "Rock Man Mark!" Not Marshmallow Mark!"

Peter the marshmallow became Peter the Rock as he boldly confessed Jesus death and resurrection even at the risk of losing his own life. Peter was given multiple opportunities to talk about Jesus and his death and resurrection. In his great letter he wrote, "For Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." Cheer up Christian, it is the cross. That's your hope of being loved by God and that's your mission in life. Amen.