"A Chance to Die: Amy Carmichael and the Obedience of the Cross"

Journey with Jesus — Session 2: Taking Up Your Cross | Luke 9:23

OPENING

Last week we talked about what it means to deny yourself. Tonight we have moved to the next phrase in Luke 9:23 — *"Take up your cross."*

- Jesus wasn't speaking in metaphor.
- He was describing a posture of daily … costly obedience.

So what does that actually look like in a *real life*?

- Tonight, Shawn asked me to introduce you to a woman who answered that question — not with words, but with 55 years of living.

Her name was Amy Carmichael.

- There's a story that a young woman once wrote to ask her *what missionary life was really like* … Amy wrote back just a few words:

> *"Missionary life is simply a chance to die."*

PART 1: WHO WAS AMY?

(Slide 1)

Amy Beatrice Carmichael was born in 1867 in Belfast, Ireland — the oldest of seven children in a devout Presbyterian family. Her father died when she was still a teenager, leaving the family in real financial hardship.

- But rather than turning inward, Amy turned outward.

She began teaching and serving the poor mill girls of Belfast — women so impoverished they couldn't even afford hats.

- They wore their shawls over their heads instead.
- People called them the "Shawlies."

Amy didn't just visit them. —> She moved into their neighborhoods.

- She slept in bug-infested beds to be close to them.
- She loved them up close.

It was at the Keswick Convention (an annual evangelical convention in Keswick England) she heard the great missionary Hudson Taylor speak — and she felt an undeniable call to the mission field.

- She applied to the China Inland Mission — however… being poor in health, she was rejected.
    - She *suffered* most of her life with continual & at times debilitating pain from neuralgia
    - But that didn't stop her …
- She then went to Japan — 15 months, before illness again forced her home.
- She tried Ceylon (pronounced "salon") – present day Sri Lanka …
- Then finally … in 1895, at age 28, she arrived in India.

And she never left.

- No furlough.
- No visits home.
- She never returned to Ireland … Ever.

She arrived — and one account describes her in that moment of arrival as *"a discouraged, confused, and ill young Irish woman."*

But she came in obedience. And obedience, it turns out … was enough.

PART 2: THE CROSS SHE CARRIED

(Slide 2)

Now — *taking up your cross …* isn't a one-time dramatic moment. For Amy, it was a daily series of costly choices.

I want to walk you through three of them.

Cross Choice #1 — Identification Over Comfort

When Amy arrived in India, she did something that genuinely scandalized other missionaries.

- She stopped wearing European clothes and began wearing a sari.
- She slept on a mat on the ground.

- She even stained her skin with coffee to better blend in among the Indian women she served.

She chose to <u>become like the people she loved</u>.

- Now — that's not just *strategy*….
- That's not a *ministry technique*….
    - That is the <u>cross</u>.
- That is <u>dying to your own *comfort* and your own *identity*</u> … so that others <u>might be reached.</u>

<u>Cross Choice #2</u> — Obedience Over Reputation

In 1901, a seven-year-old girl named Preena showed up at Amy's door.

- She had escaped from a Hindu temple where she was being groomed for prostitution.
- She had tried to escape before — and as punishment, her hands had been branded with hot irons.

Amy took her in. And then she couldn't stop. Child after child began arriving at <u>Dohnavur</u>. ("Dough'-nah-vurr")

- Amy rescued them … housed them … loved them … and raised them <u>in the faith</u>.
- And the Hindu priests fought back hard …
    - She was taken to court <u>repeatedly</u> — accused of *kidnapping*.
        - Resented.
        - Slandered.
        - Opposed.

Meanwhile … back home in England —> Christians were troubled by *something else <u>entirely</u>* …

- Amy kept writing the <u>*truth*</u> about <u>what mission life was actually like</u> …
    - The *darkness*. The *resistance*. The *difficulty*.
- They wanted inspiring stories … but she wouldn't romanticize.

She chose truth over applause… Obedience over reputation.

<u>Cross Choice #3</u> — Fruitfulness Through Suffering

In 1931, Amy had a serious fall … and <u>she was bedridden</u> for the <u>remaining</u> 20 years of her life.

- Twenty years.

- In a room.
- Unable to fully move about the work she had given everything to build.

But … from that bed —

- she wrote 16 more books.
- She continued to lead.
- To disciple.
- To pour herself out —
    - even when "she, herself" …
    - had been reduced to a single room and a writing desk.

She had written years earlier, in her poem "Hast Thou No Scar" — (which Shawn will share later) —

> *"Can he have followed far … who has no wound nor scar?"*

- She *wasn't* writing *theory*.
- She was writing autobiography.

The Dohnavur ("dough'-nuh-vuur") Fellowship she founded ultimately sheltered over 1,000 children.

- Every one of them called her the same thing — *Amma.*
- The Tamil ("tahm'-il") - word for mother.

And when she died in 1951, that is what they put on her headstone. Not *missionary*. Not *founder*. Not *author…* Just — *Amma.*

PART 3: WHAT HER LIFE SAYS TO US

(Slide 3)

Elisabeth Elliot — *herself* no stranger to loss and sacrifice — wrote the definitive biography of Amy Carmichael.

- She titled it *"A Chance to Die."*
- She chose that title because she understood something Amy understood deeply:
    - Following Jesus is *not* about self-improvement.
    - It is about self-surrender …
        - Daily…
        - In the small choices and the large ones alike.

Amy's poem "Make Me Thy Fuel, Flame of God" —

- is a prayer that captures everything about the way she lived:
- Listen to these lines:

"From subtle love of softening things, from easy choices, weakenings — not thus are spirits fortified, not this way … went the Crucified."

She prayed against the easy path. She prayed for the obedient one.

- And her life message — her one clear, consistent, 55-year message — is this:
- Taking up your cross is not a crisis. It is a commitment.
    - It is the accumulation of ten thousand *daily* decisions to …
        - choose obedience over comfort...
        - faithfulness over favorability...
        - love over self-protection.

CLOSING

Jesus said in Luke 9:23 —

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

- The word daily is everything.

Amy Carmichael didn't have one heroic moment.

- She had 55 years of daily ones.
    - In health — and in illness.
    - In fruitfulness — and in fierce opposition.
    - In strength — and in a bed she could not leave.

And the question her life puts to each of us tonight is simply this:

What is the daily cross in front of you right now — and what would it look like … in obedience …to pick it up?