

"Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

Jewish Heritage Revival

One Heritage United by Messiah



"And When he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" John 10:4

Home Page: www.jewishheritagerevival.com

Are You Prepared To Pay The Price?

Are you a believer and therefore follower of our Messiah?

Are you aware of what is required to serve and follow Him?

Matthew 16:24 –Then Yeshua told his talmidim, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him say `No' to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me."

The emphasis of this sermon will focus on the last two directives from our Messiah's statement. In Part 1 we will focus on "take up your cross" while in Part 2 we will look further into His instruction to "Follow Me".

What does He mean when He says "take up your cross"?

Within the Messianic Community today, many have taught and believe that when our Messiah said to "take up your cross" meant:

- To carry our burdens
- Our challenges
- Our obstacles
- Our shortcomings, etc...

The understanding that has been taught today makes this very important warning more of a personal challenge to overcome rather than the meaning our Messiah originally intended it to be...ultimately neutralizing its true impact.

Therefore, if this wasn't our Messiah's original intention for this instruction, what is He referring to regarding

taking up one's cross?

In order to truly understand what our Messiah is trying to convey with regards to following Him, we must first understand and relate the context of what He is saying with the period in time that He is speaking.

Our Messiah used parables to teach, as well as symbols or what we would call today "object lessons", whereby He would use something familiar that would help in conveying His teachings to His disciples.

Such visuals include:

Was it lawful to pay taxes to Rome - using the denarius and Caesar's image. Matthew 22:15 - 23

"Then the P'rushim went away and put together a plan to trap Yeshua with his own words. They sent him some of their talmidim and some members of Herod's party. They said, "Rabbi, we know that you tell the truth and really teach what God's way is. You aren't concerned with what other people think about you, since you pay no attention to a person's status. So tell us your opinion: does Torah permit paying taxes to the Roman Emperor or not?" Yeshua, however, knowing their malicious intent, said, "You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used to pay the tax!" They brought him a denarius; and he asked them, "Whose name and picture are these?" "The Emperor's," they replied. Yeshua said to them, "Nu, give the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor. And give to God what belongs to God!" On hearing this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. That same day, some Tz'dukim came to him. They are the ones who say there is no such thing as resurrection, so they put to him a sh'eilah:"

Our Messiah relating Himself to a good shepherd: John 10:1 - 20

"Yes, indeed! I tell you, the person who doesn't enter the sheep-pen through the door, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. But the one who goes in through the gate is the sheep's own shepherd. This is the one the gate-keeper admits, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep, each one by name, and leads them out. After taking out all that are his own, he goes on ahead of them; and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They never follow a stranger but will run away from him, because strangers' voices are unfamiliar to them." Yeshua used this indirect manner of speaking with them, but they didn't understand what he was talking to them about. So Yeshua said to them again, "Yes, indeed! I tell you that I am the gate for the sheep. All those who have come before me have been thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the gate; if someone enters through me, he will be safe and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, life in its fullest measure."

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, since he isn't a shepherd and the sheep aren't his own, sees the wolf coming, abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf drags them off and scatters them. The hired worker behaves like this because that's all he is, a hired worker; so it doesn't matter to him what happens to the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own, and my own know me -- just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father -- and I lay down my life on behalf of the sheep. Also I have other sheep which are not from this pen; I need to bring them, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock, one shepherd. "This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life -- in order to take it up again! No one takes it away from me; on the contrary, I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. This is what my Father commanded me to do." Again there was a split among the Judeans because of what he said. Many of them said, "He has a demon!" and "He's meshugga! Why do you listen to him?"

Both examples used images of the time that our Messiah's disciples and others who heard His teachings could relate to and more importantly understand. Now that we understand our Messiah's teaching methods, we can go on to better understand the symbolism for "take up your cross" Our Messiah was using something very familiar at the time...

The image and impact of the Roman cross.

At the time of our Messiah, Judea, was controlled by Rome. The yoke of oppression inflicted by Rome weighed heavy. The tax burden imposed by Rome to continually feed Roman expansion was relentless and never ending. There were many within Judea that were opposed to this Roman control, yet were powerless. Those that went against Rome were found guilty of treason. A crime punishable by death. They would pay the ultimate price for their attempts to liberate Judea from Roman oppression...death on a Roman cross.

Now, imagine the scene in the time of our Messiah. The path to the eastern gate (a heavily traveled entrance into Jerusalem) was lined on both sides with Roman crosses of those who were bold enough and brave enough to stand up to the Roman tyranny. They would be made examples for everyone who lived in Jerusalem and visited Jerusalem...further emphasizing Rome's power. If anyone were to come against Rome, their fate was on display.

- Hundreds crosses lined this path (eastern gate as well as the other gates for entrance into Jerusalem)
- Over 30,000 Jews were put to death by the Roman cross
- Blood, suffering and death were scenes for public viewing

The emphasis that our Messiah intended when He spoke, that if you were to follow Him, you will need to take up your cross. This statement was to prepare everyone who believed and would follow Him, that there would be persecution, suffering and possibly death for following Him. The images were very fresh in the disciples minds, for it was a daily occurrence, while in Jerusalem. You could not enter the city without passing by crosses. Rome chose the most traveled paths in order act as a deterrent for others who were considering challenging their authority.

Today's interpretation of this command greatly minimizes the impact that our Messiah had intended when He spoke it. By watering it down, many within the Messianic Community are being led astray to believe that they will not suffer, that they will not be persecuted. Any believer who has this mind set needs to wake up.

We need only look at others who followed and served our Messiah:

● Stephen – stoned Acts 7:54 – 60

"On hearing these things, they were cut to their hearts and ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Ruach HaKodesh, looked up to heaven and saw God's Sh'khinah, with Yeshua standing at the right hand of God. "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn't have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him, threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha'ul. As they were stoning him, Stephen called out to God, "Lord Yeshua! Receive my spirit!" Then he knelt down and shouted out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" With that, he died;"

● Persecution against the Messianic Community Acts 8:1 - 3

"and Sha'ul gave his approval to his murder. Starting with that day, there arose intense persecution against the Messianic Community in Yerushalayim; all but the emissaries were scattered throughout the regions of Y'hudah and Shomron. Some godly men buried Stephen and mourned him deeply. But Sha'ul set out to destroy the Messianic Community - entering house after house, he dragged off both men and women and handed them over to be put in prison.

● Kefa (Peter) – arrested and put in prison Acts 12:1 – 4 (James, brother of John)

"It was around this time that King Herod began arresting and persecuting certain members of the Messianic community; and he had Ya'akov, Yochanan's brother, put to death by the sword. When Herod saw how much this pleased the Judeans, he went on to arrest Kefa as well. It was during the Days of Matzah, so when Herod seized him, he threw him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each, with the intention of bringing him to public trial after Pesach."

- Kefa (Peter) crucified upside down – not accounted for in God's Word.
- Sha'ul and Barnabas persecuted – Acts 13:48 - 52

"The Gentiles were very happy to hear this. They honored the message about the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life came to trust. And the message about the Lord was carried throughout the whole region. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the women 'God-fearers' of high social standing and the leading men of the city, and they organized persecution against Sha'ul and Bar-Nabba and expelled them from their district. However, Sha'ul and Bar-Nabba shook off the dust of their feet against them and went on to Iconium; and the talmidim were filled with joy and with the Ruach HaKodesh. "

● **Sha'ul stoned at Lystra Acts 14:19 – 20**

"Then some unbelieving Jews came from Antioch and Iconium. They won over the crowds, stoned Sha'ul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But as the talmidim gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town. The next day, he left with Bar-Nabba for Derbe"

● **Sha'ul and Silas beaten and imprisoned – Acts 16:16 – 24**

"Once, when we were going to the place where the minyan gathered, we were met by a slave girl who had in her a snake-spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes. This girl followed behind Sha'ul and the rest of us and kept screaming, "These men are servants of God Ha'Elyon! They're telling you how to be saved!" She kept this up day after day, until Sha'ul, greatly disturbed, turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Yeshua the Messiah, I order you to come out of her!" And the spirit did come out, at that very moment. But when her owners saw that what had come out was any further prospect of profit for them, they seized Sha'ul and Sila and dragged them to the market square to face the authorities. Bringing them to the judges, they said, "These men are causing a lot of trouble in our city, since they are Jews. What they are doing is advocating customs that are against the law for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans." The mob joined in the attack against them, and the judges tore their clothes off them and ordered that they be flogged. After giving them a severe beating, they threw them in prison, charging the jailer to guard them securely. Upon receiving such an order, he threw them into the inner cell and clamped their feet securely between heavy blocks of wood."

● **Sha'ul seized in the temple and then bound by roman soldiers – Acts 21:27 – 36**

"The seven days were almost up when some unbelieving Jews from the province of Asia saw him in the Temple, stirred up all the crowd and grabbed him. "Men of Isra'el, help!" they shouted. "This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone things against the people, against the Torah and against this place! And now he has even brought some Goyim into the Temple and defiled this holy place!" (They had previously seen Trophimus from Ephesus in the city with him and assumed that Sha'ul had brought him into the Temple.) The whole city was aroused, and people came running from all over. They seized Sha'ul and dragged him out of the Temple, and at once the gates were shut. But while they were attempting to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman battalion that all Yerushalayim was in turmoil. Immediately he took officers and soldiers and charged down upon them. As soon as they saw the commander, they quit beating Sha'ul. Then the commander came up, arrested him and ordered him to be tied up with two chains. He asked who he was and what he had done. Everyone in the crowd shouted something different; so, since he couldn't find out what had happened because of the uproar, he ordered him brought to the barracks. When Sha'ul got to the steps, he actually had to be carried by the soldiers, because the mob was so wild - the crowd kept following and screaming, "Kill him!"

● **Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist) – Imprisoned and killed – Matthew 14:1 - 12**

"Around that time, Herod, the regional governor, heard of the fame of Yeshua and said to his attendants, "This must be Yochanan the Immerser. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." For Herod had arrested Yochanan, put him in chains and thrown him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip; since Yochanan had told Herod, "It violates the Torah for you to have her as your wife." Herod had wanted to put Yochanan to death; but he was afraid of the people, in whose eyes Yochanan was a prophet. However, at Herod's birthday celebration, Herodias' daughter danced before the company and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of Yochanan the Immerser." The king became deeply upset; but out of regard for the oaths he had sworn before his dinner guests, he ordered that her wish be granted, and sent and had Yochanan beheaded in prison. The head was brought on a platter to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. Yochanan's talmidim came, took the body and buried it; then they went and told Yeshua."

In stark contrast...

We look at how the Armed Services in America have used the following slogans to promote entering into service:

- Pay for a college education through the GI bill
- See the world
- The few, the proud, the Marines
- We do more before 6 AM than most people do in a day

We all know that the armed services are to protect through battle, with a very real possibility that the price for our freedom will be paid for through the loss of life by soldiers. Notice how the mention of the potential for the loss of one's life in service is not even mentioned. The reality of service is glossed over, in order to make serving in the military more enticing.

Note: Please note that I am in no way demeaning those that have served in the military and to those that have ultimately given their lives to protect our freedom, but to convey how the government promotes the armed services in relation to how our Messiah conveyed what the potential price would be for serving Him.

The contrast between the two is like night and day. Our Messiah didn't mince words but conveyed that there is a very real possibility that you will suffer and ultimately lose your life by following Him.

At first, this doesn't appear to be very encouraging...

However, this is what our Messiah goes on to say –

"Then Yeshua told his talmidim, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him say `No' to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me. For whoever wants to save his own life will destroy it, but whoever destroys his life for my sake will find it. What good will it do someone if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or, what can a person give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come in his Father's glory, with his angels; and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct." Matthew 16:24 – 27

If you are willing to lose your life for Him, you will ultimately gain your life. A contrast, that when using human understanding doesn't make any sense. However, when using the wisdom and understanding of God, the life you will gain is eternal...everlasting.

The North American Messianic Community is not prepared for what is to come. We read of other countries outlawing the possession of God's Word, congregating with other believers not to mention persecuting and in many cases killing believers of our Messiah. There is a false sense of security in this country, that what is happening there won't happen here.

It is only a matter of time before we see this statement of our Messiah become a reality in this country:

“At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me. At that time many will be trapped into betraying and hating each other,” Matthew 24:9 - 10

We have written in previous articles about the false security of an "impending rapture" that will take believers away from the impending tribulation. If there is no escape (rapture) and we are to go through a time of tribulation (for which we have been going through since our Messiah's departure), then...

What is our hope?

Our hope is in what our Messiah said - **"But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered."** Matthew 24:13

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."— John 14:1

If we are obedient and faithful, He would not leave us alone in this world...

"If you love me, you will keep my commands; and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another comforting Counselor like me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever. The world cannot receive him, because it neither sees nor knows him. You know him, because he is staying with you and will be united with you. I will not leave you orphans -- I am coming to you." John 14:15 – 18

Now, we need to be careful and take heed to our Messiah's warning...

"Yeshua replied: "Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you!" - Matthew 24:4

In 14 passages of scripture, Jesus our Messiah and the new testament writers warn us not to be deceived. The result being...

"For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray." Matthew 24:5

Rabbi Sha'ul writes to the congregation at Galatia...

"But whoever is being instructed in the Word should share all the good things he has with his instructor. Don't delude yourselves: no one makes a fool of God! A person reaps what he sows. Those who keep sowing in the field of their old nature, in order to meet its demands, will eventually reap ruin; but those who keep sowing in the field of the Spirit will reap from the Spirit everlasting life. So let us not grow weary of doing what is good; for if we don't give up, we will in due time reap the harvest." Galatians 6:6 - 9

My concern...

If those whom our Messiah broke bread with were unable to avoid persecution for whom they followed, what they taught and believed, what would lead you to believe that you are exempt from such possibilities as His disciple?

With a proper perspective placed upon what our Messiah told His disciples when He told them what was required for following Him...Are you are a believer and therefore follower of Jesus our Messiah?

Do you understand what is required of you?

Are you prepared to pay the price for what you believe and who you follow?