

"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

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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 said Jesus to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow 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 church 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 Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius.

And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"

They said to Him, "Caesar's."

And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

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

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. 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 church 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**

"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

- **Persecution against the church Acts 8:1**

"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

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

" Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover."

- **Peter crucified upside down – not accounted for in God's Word.**

- **Paul and Barnabas persecuted – Acts 13:48 - 52**

"Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them,

and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

- **Paul stoned at Lystra Acts 14:19 – 20**

"Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

- **Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned – Acts 16:16 – 24**

"Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."

- **Paul seized in the temple and then bound by roman soldiers – Acts 21:27 – 36**

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

- **John the Baptist – Imprisoned and killed – Matthew 14:1 - 12**

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus."

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 Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

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 church 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:

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another." 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 he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."** 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, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." John 14:15 – 18

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

"Take Heed that No man deceive 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 Christ,' and will deceive many. Matthew 24:5

Rabbi Paul writes to the congregation at Galatia...

"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." 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?