

Cross Words

Training To Take Up Our Cross

November 19, 2023

Today we're trying to figure out what it means to take up our own cross!



But first: **What are you bringing to the table?** Thanksgiving is this Thursday, which means it's *time* to *remind* ourselves to be a *light* in the *darkness*, when we *mix it up* with the most *infuriating* people in the *world: family!* Whether it's *bossy brother, snippy sister, Grandma Grudgey, Grandpa Drinky, Uncle Pol ... itics*, or even *Auntie Anti-Semite*, the choice between the *light* and the *dark* goes *way beyond* the *turkey meat*; because, **our deepest offenses come from those closest.** Often, *those* who *sit* before you have been *deliberately set* before you as a *challenge to endure ... with joy.*

[Therefore] let us run with *endurance* the race that is *set* before us, *looking* unto Jesus ... who for the *joy* that was *set* before *Him* endured the *cross* ... *consider* Him who *endured* such *hostility* from *sinner*s against *Himself*, lest you become *weary* – Hebrews 12:1-3 NKJ

And *give* 'em a *piece* of your *mind* rather than the *peace* in your *heart*. If our *Savior* could *endure* the *hostility* of the *cross*, certainly **we can train ourselves to endure the hostility of cross words** from *infuriating friends* and *family*. Then we can *please* the Lord by bringing *love* and *joy*; but **the peace we bring to the table may not bring peace in the moment.**

As Jesus finished publically preparing to push His young apprentices out on their own, to speak and act on His behalf, in His authority and power, among *their families* and *friends*, it likely *shocked* the *crowd* when He told the *boys* their *mission* was *not* to bring *peace*. Saying:



Everyone who *acknowledges* Me before *men*, [whether it's *Grandpa Drinky* or *Uncle Politics*] I also will *acknowledge* before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever *denies* Me before men, I also will *deny* before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring *peace*, but a *sword*. – Matthew 10:32-34 ESV

For the *Word* of *God* is living and powerful, and *sharper* than *any* two-edged *sword*, piercing even to the division of *soul* and *spirit* – Hebrews 4:12 NKJ

But didn't the angels proclaim *peace* on *earth* when Jesus was *born*? Not *quite*.

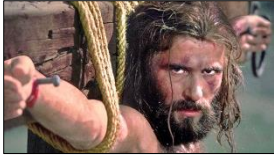
[They said] On earth *peace* among those with whom [God] is pleased! – Luke 2:14 ESV

[So] *Walk* worthy of the Lord, *fully pleasing* Him ... giving *thanks* [especially at *Thanksgiving*] to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the *light*. He has delivered *us* from the power of *darkness* ... having *made* *peace* through the blood of *His cross*. – Colossians 1:10-20 NKJ

[Jesus continues to shock His listeners, saying] For I have come to set a man against his father, [if need be] and a daughter against her mother ... [point is] a person's enemies will be those of his own household. [As will his allies, hopefully] – Matthew 10:35-36 ESV



So love your frenemies and don't let 'em catch you off guard. **Actual truth always causes some kind of commotion.** People rarely speak it, hear it, ponder it, or know how to deal with it. But **that's what we bring, with love, without fear of hostility,** in order to walk worthy of the One who is love.



[Who said to the boys that day] Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. – Matthew 10:37-38 ESV



Rabbis demanded great respect; but, **only Christ demands this kind of devotion.** Because, **we can only love them best when we love Him most.**



So maybe it's time to stir the pot, by giving thanks for your Savior at your Thanksgiving table. In fact, if we allow the fear of any family member or friend to override our faith, **we're not only unworthy of Jesus** as our Savior and Lord, **we're unworthy of them** as our family and friends!

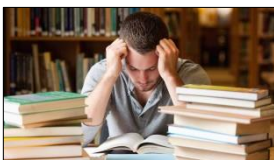
[Because, Jesus said] Whoever wants to be My disciple must [1] deny themselves [rather than Christ] and [2] take up their cross daily and follow Me. – Luke 9:23 NIV

Okay. I'm on board. But ... what's that even mean? I mean, **Jesus didn't carry His cross.**

As they led Him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, [Africa] who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. – Luke 23:26 NIV



So, why doesn't Jesus carry His own cross? And what cross are we carrying daily? Well, whatever Jesus is saying or doing or teaching, you can be sure He's speaking fluent Old Testament. Which means, **we got'a sharpen our Sword by seeking the Lord in the light of His Word.** Cuz He pushes us to engage His Word to grasp His meaning. **We don't need to scrutinize Scripture like theologians.** But **we should know the basic stories like children.** In fact, the Lord expects us to receive His Word into our hearts so we can hear with our ears. Saying:



Receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and [then you'll be able to] hear with your ears. – Ezekiel 3:10 NKJ



So, **what cross are we lifting up and carrying when following Jesus?** The answer to that is as simple as learning the stories like a child. Like the one about the guy in the OT who lifted up a cross and carried it and followed Jesus. Any guesses? Moses! **He lifted up a cross-shaped banner pole and hung a bronze snake on it.** "Wait. Moses followed Jesus?"

Now I want to remind you ... that [it was] Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, [and] afterward destroyed those who did not believe. – Jude 1:5 ESV

We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. – 1 Cor. 10:9 NIV

[You see] The Lord sent venomous snakes among them ... and many Israelites died. [Of all the ways to punish sin, why that?! To remind 'em how it all began with a snake in the Garden. And it worked] The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned ... Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away ...” [but, He didn't. Instead] The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a [banner] pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” [Of all the ways to heal 'em, why that? To remind 'em that salvation comes by grace through faith] ... Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and [simply believed and] looked at the bronze snake, he lived. [Till he died another way on another day] – Numbers 21:6-9 NIV

That bronze serpent that Moses lifted up and carried along with God's people, wherever the Lord led 'em, was filled with symbolism that went way beyond this OT miracle. Remember in the story, when God first called Moses, and turned his shepherd's staff into a snake?

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake ... [and] Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff ... And he took the staff of God in his hand. The Lord said ... “You [and Aaron] perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do.” [Of all the miracles, why that?] – Exodus 4:2-4, 20-21 NIV

It was a setup! Cuz **this was an old Egyptian magician's trick** – but God had a twist in mind.

Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake [by the power of God] ... and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their [own human] secret arts ... But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. – Exodus 7:10-12 NIV

And Isaiah was shown that **this would be symbolic of the One who would save mankind from our enemy** (who, as a snake, introduced sin and death into God's Garden), prophesying that:

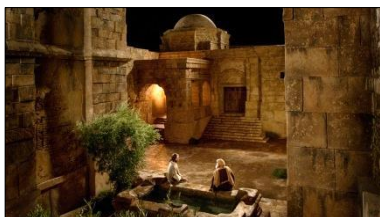
He will swallow up death forever ... this is our God ... He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” – Isaiah 25:8-9 NKJ

[Which is one of the reasons] [Jesus said] “I am ... the life.” – John 14:6 NKJ

... that mortality may be swallowed up by life. [Everlasting] – 2 Corinthians 5:4 NKJ

[Jesus] suffered death, so that ... He might taste death for everyone. – Hebrews 2:9 NIV

[Get it?] Death has been swallowed up in victory. – 1 Corinthians 15:54 NIV



On the cross, like that life-saving snake, **Jesus became the object of faith in God's grace to reverse the repercussions of sin**, for anyone who'll simply believe, and turn to Him. And this is what we bring to the table. It isn't a theological theory. It's a children's story that Jesus laid out very clearly to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, one night. Saying:

“Just as Moses *lifted up the snake* ... so the *Son of Man* must be *lifted up*, that everyone who *believes* in Him may have *eternal life*. For God so loved the *[dysfunctional families of this]* world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever *[simply]* believes in Him *[and turns to Him]* shall not *perish* but have *eternal life*. For God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn* the world, *[the snake in the Garden did that]* but to *save* the world through Him.” – John 3:14-17 NIV

[Who said] “When I am *lifted up* from the earth, *[I]* will draw *all* men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of *death* He was going to die. The crowd spoke up, “... how can You say, ‘The *Son of Man* must be *lifted up*’?” – John 12:32-34 NIV

Well, **why didn't Jesus carry His own cross? Cuz He's not the one lifting it; He's the One on it!** Like Moses, it's up to God's faithful to “take up their cross daily” and carry it with ‘em, **to offer a taste of life to a dying world.** We all share the same cross; because **His cross is our cross.**



There were actually three crosses carried to Calvary. Remember the *two thieves*: one *mocked* Jesus, while the other *turned to Him*? One *carried the cross of the sin* from which he *wouldn't repent*, while the other *carried the cross of the sin* from which he *would*. While Simon carried the *cross of the Savior*.

Question is: **Which cross are you currently carrying?** One brought *death*. One brought *life* – but just for the *thief* himself. Whereas the Savior's cross, carried by Simon, brought the *light of life* to a *dark and dying* world, *poisoned by sin*. And, like that *one symbolic snake* that *saved* believers from the *poison* of every other *snake*, **Jesus is the One Savior who swallows up sin and death** and all the *effects of the enemies of the Gospel of God's grace*, calling them *what*?

“You *snakes!* You brood of *vipers!*” – Matthew 23:33 NIV

[Because] “The *poison of vipers* is on *their lips*.” – Romans 3:13 NIV

[So] “Whatever town or village you enter *[this Thursday]* ... If the home is *deserving*, let your *peace rest* on it; if it is *not*, let your peace *return* to you. *[But whatever you do, don't let your peace fail in the face of hostility]* If anyone will not *welcome* you or *listen* to your *words*, *shake the dust off your feet* when you *leave*” – Matthew 10:11-14 NIV

While you're with those who *rub* you the *wrong way*, and *grate* on your *nerves*, and act *more* like *enemies* than *friends* and *family*, **endure 'em with joy; and then when you leave, shake it off!**

[Cuz Jesus said] “I am *[deliberately]* *sending you out* like *sheep* among *wolves*. Therefore be as *shrewd* as *snakes* and *[yet]* as *innocent* as *doves*.” – Matthew 10:16 NIV

[So] Let us fix our eyes on *Jesus* ... who for the *joy* ... *endured* the *cross* – Hebrews 12:2 NIV

And remember that **that's what you're gonna bring to the table!**