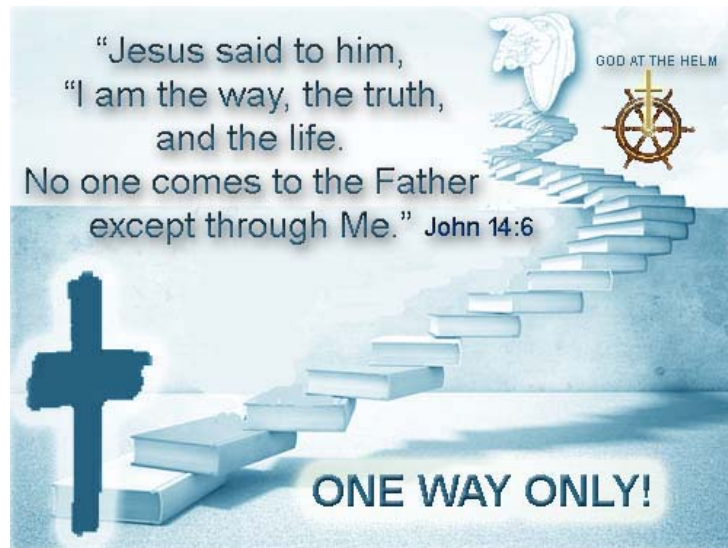


TAKING OUR CROSS



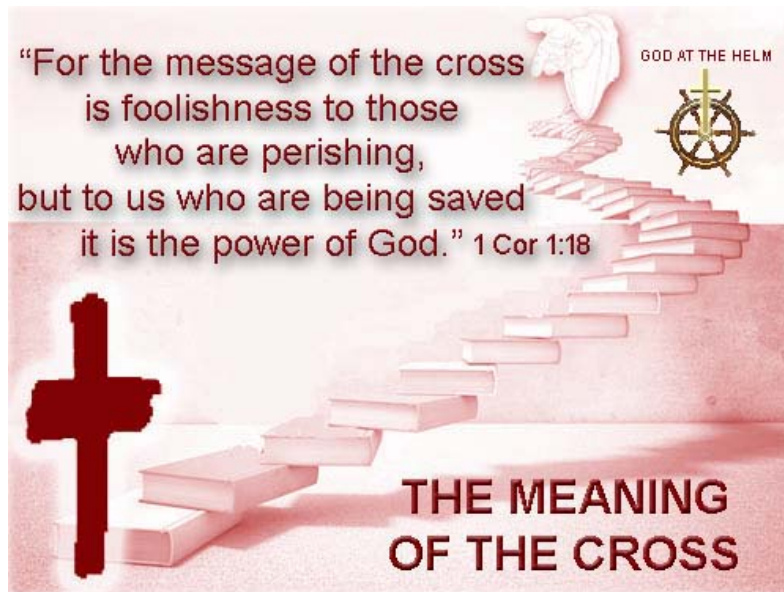
The most direct and clear statement that Jesus made to point us to God is without a doubt when He said that “NO ONE” comes to the Father except through ME,” right? In essence, He clearly stated that He is the only solution, the only possibility, the only way to be accepted by God.

In addition to this Jesus added, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) This statement is repeated in the gospels of Luke, Matthew and Mark; and obviously, it must be crucial. An important aspect is the fact that Jesus didn’t state this as an option, but made it a command that leaves no doubt as to its importance, a dominant spiritual principle of life and death.

To that effect, Jesus pointed out in the following verse of Luke 9, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.” From this, we can conclude that our core responsibility towards God and Christ boils down to this: either we choose to follow God or we don’t. It is, in other words, an eternal decision.

What does it mean to carry our cross? Why should we if Christ died for us? How does that happen, what if...? Scriptural answers in the days to come!

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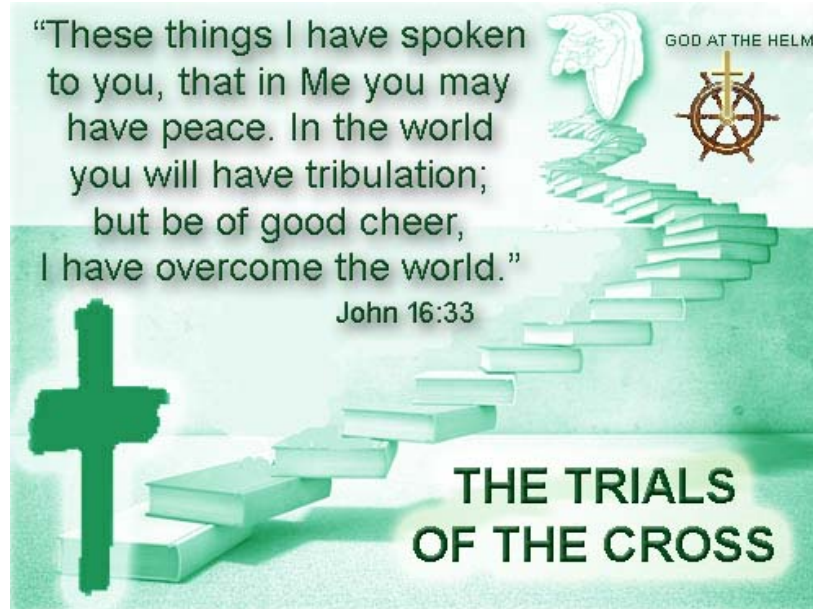
So, what does it mean to carry our cross? The apostle Paul in Gal. 6:14 said: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” In common vernacular, this tells us that we must crucify the pleasures of the world from our lives, and as a result separate ourselves from the works of the flesh.

In 2 Cor 10:4-5 Paul added this: “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

This clearly indicates that carrying our cross daily can only be achieved through the help and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and that our focus, our primary reason for living, our hopes and dreams, our goals and whatever else in life must always have for purpose to honor God. As well, this can only be done if we follow Christ in all aspects of our lives.

Therefore, since Christ has been crucified in the flesh, we as well must crucify the flesh daily through living in obedience to the Word of God. Tomorrow, what we can expect from the world?

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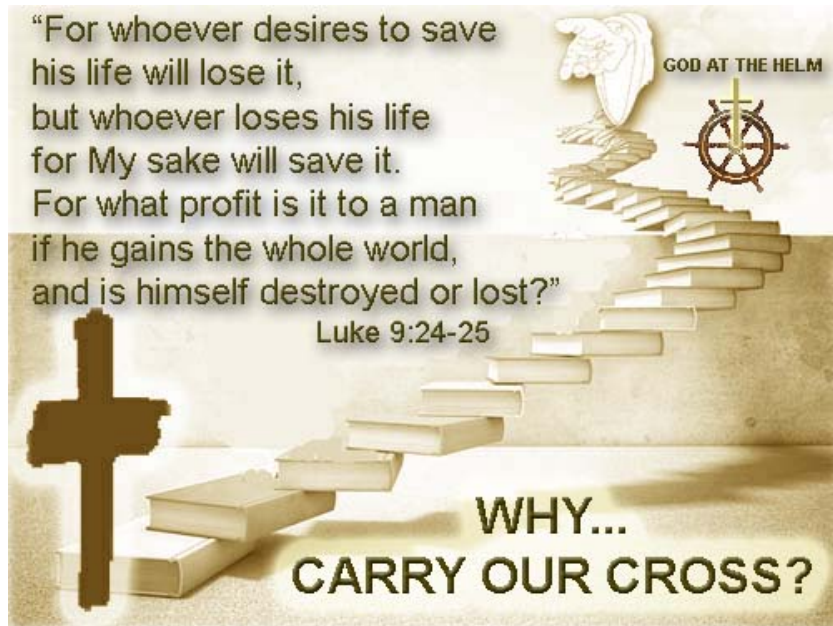
One of the most often quoted scripture by material prosperity seekers is "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." (John 10:10) The truth is that the enemy of our faith seeks to keep us busy seeking the kingdoms of this world rather than God's.

Did Christ teach us to desire the things of this world, or didn't He rather point us to desire and seek an abundant spiritual life? Didn't Paul as well tell us 'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth'? (Col 3:2) The featured scripture tells us that we are to expect trials, and this will happen to anyone living to honor, worship and serve God. That's why Paul said in 2 Tim 2:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Who are the examples we must follow? First Christ Himself, as Peter points out; "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1Peter 2:21) As well, didn't all of Jesus' apostles face trials throughout their lives, leaving us a strong example of what taking our cross daily entails?

Have we dropped our cross along the way to follow the world?

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Have we ever asked ourselves why Christ taught us that in this life, we will have to carry our cross? Why should we if Christ actually suffered the cross on our behalf?

Peter explained the believer's responsibility in following Christ this way: "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24) In other words, Christ died to open the door for us to be reconciled to God. To so believe in Christ's sacrifice then requires that we die to sin, and therefore reject the temptations and pressures that the world imposes on us. We must remember that the world hates Christ, and as a result hates anyone who follows Christ.

In essence, in making the decision to follow Christ, we set ourselves on a path to live as He taught us; henceforth being rejected by the world as a result. That's the cross we must bear, and it is not only limited to the world, but sometimes rejection may even come from loved ones.

Jesus in Matthew 10:38 put it this way: "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." So, evidently, the cross in a believer's life is not an option, but rather a fact. Is our cross still within sight?

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How could we define the path of the cross that Christ asked us to carry?

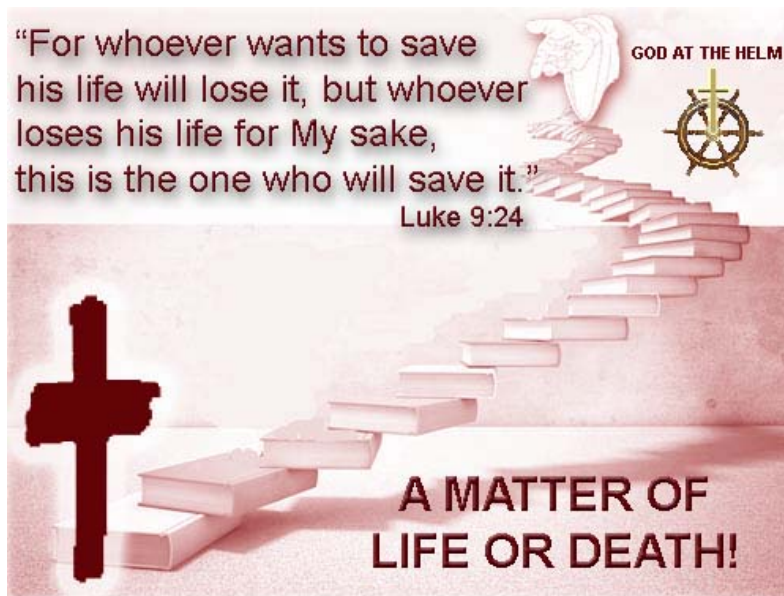
Jesus in Mat 7:13 started by showing us how to find that path to salvation this way: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction.” In other words, it starts with understanding that it won’t be easy, but rather requires we surrender our lives to Christ as our only source for salvation.

Paul consistently enjoined us to consider our life to be living for Christ. Here are a few examples: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2:20) “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Col 3:5) “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 6:11)

Jesus finally crowned the path this way: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mat 6:19-21)

Where’s our treasure right now?

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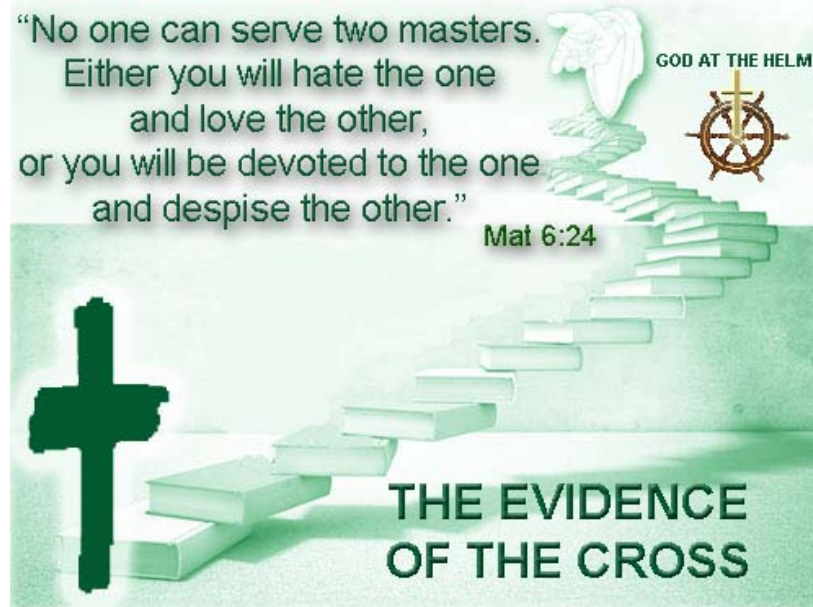


On many occasions, Jesus taught us that every decision and choice we make in life will bring a corresponding outcome. Additionally, He clearly demonstrated that the true person is not necessarily what shows on the outside, but that it all starts with the heart disposition. That's why in John 3:36 He said, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

We are also warned that satanic powers are deathly intent to destroy us, as Paul said in Eph 6:12; "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly places." In Rom 8:13 he added, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." That's where spiritual life or death resides.

If we bring these scriptures to a common denominator, we could conclude that even the life of a true believer will encompass challenges from the enemy, and we must heed the warnings that Christ and His disciples laid out, so we aren't fooled and deceived by the enemy.

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Is there evidence in our lives that attests to the bearing of our cross daily to follow Christ? Can it be the fact we go to church regularly, serve in some ministry or give to the poor? Or is it the title we post at the end of our name to identify our belief or mission?

From God's perspective, who we are in Christ is not related to how busy we might claim to be for the Lord. What counts with God has always been and will ever be what proceeds from the heart. Do we serve the Lord to get attention and the glory, or is the glory directed to Christ? Paul clearly defined true believers this way: "And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:24) In other words, the proof we are Christ's is not measured in any accomplishments we claim, but rather the core disposition of our heart.

Jesus also made this clear in John 14:21; "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Who is our master? Is it God, or is it pride and the things of the world? Didn't Jesus say that He must be first, even before parents, children, spouse, even before our own life? (Luke 14:26)

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