

Because Jesus Bore His Cross for Us...

- I. We can be absolutely sure of God's love and faithfulness.
- II. We carry our crosses after Him.

Dear Christian friends,

"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

With those **clear words** Jesus makes clear that HE SETS the terms for **our relationship** with Him. We don't tell Jesus, "THIS IS HOW we're going to do things." Jesus **also makes clear** that there is no such thing as being a Christian only when it's CONVENIENT for us. "Jesus, You be there when I need You, otherwise just leave me alone and **not interfere** in my life." That's what our **sinful natures want**, right? So we have our excuses for our **pet sins** – we tell ourselves that God will "UNDERSTAND." ***"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."***

Jesus cuts us no slack – but if that's all we see we've actually missed the point of today's readings. BEFORE Jesus spoke about us and **our crosses** He first spoke about HIS life and HIS cross. ***"The Son of Man must suffer many things ...He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*** We know why Jesus did that – "FOR US and for our salvation." Jesus' perfect life is the perfect life **we owed** God. Jesus' innocent death on the cross is the forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus' triumphant resurrection is God's promise of eternal life in heaven. WITHOUT Jesus and His cross we have nothing and there's no good reason for us to ***"take up our cross and follow Him."*** Only by FIRST STANDING at Jesus' cross can we understand His call to ***"deny ourselves – take up our cross and follow Him."***

We see that illustrated here in Joseph's life. So let's look at these verses with **this thought** – BECAUSE JESUS BORE HIS CROSS FOR US 1)we can be absolutely sure of God's **love** and **faithfulness** and 2)we then carry our crosses after Him.

I. We can be absolutely sure of God's love and faithfulness.

BECAUSE JESUS **bore His cross** for us we can be absolutely sure about God's love and **faithfulness**. BECAUSE JESUS bore His cross for us we need never wonder or worry – "Does God REALLY love me? Can I REALLY count on God to keep His promises?" I wonder if Joseph was ALWAYS SO SURE of God's love and faithfulness.

Let's back up a minute. Joseph was one of the 12 sons born to **Jacob**. It was also well-known to everybody that Joseph was daddy's FAVORITE. Joseph seems to have had a problem with a bit of a BIG HEAD. Joseph had had two dreams that INDICATED that **one day** Joseph would end up a VIP and in power over even his dad and brothers. Joseph just had to tell them his dreams. Joseph's brothers had had enough of him. They sold Joseph to some **slave traders** who took him down to Egypt. There ***"Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard"*** bought Joseph. Sold by his brothers – living as a slave in a **foreign country** – do you THINK JOSEPH was absolutely sure of God's love and faithfulness?

Then there's the incident with Potiphar's wife. ***"Day after day"*** she tries to get Joseph to **come to bed** with her. ***"Day after day"*** Joseph refuses. ***"One day"*** it seems she arranged for the house to be empty. She grabs Joseph ***"by his cloak"*** – but Joseph runs away – leaving his cloak with Potiphar's wife. She then concocts a story of Joseph **trying to rape** her but her screams made him

run away. Potiphar ***“burned with anger ...and put Joseph in prison.”*** Joseph was 17 years old when Potiphar bought him. Joseph had faithfully worked for Potiphar AS A SLAVE for **quite a few** years. Now Joseph would spend more years in prison. Do you think Joseph was **absolutely sure** of God’s love and faithfulness?

By OUTWARD APPEARANCES it looked as if God was **nowhere** to be found in Joseph’s life. Yet several times in this chapter we are specifically told, ***“the LORD was with Joseph.”***

How can we be absolutely sure of God’s love and faithfulness? IF we go by the OUTWARD **circumstances** of our lives – how things are going for us – there will be plenty of times when we’ll QUESTION God’s love – faithfulness – wisdom – ways. Our certainty of God’s love and faithfulness is found in Jesus and His cross.

That we have God’s own Son as our PERSONAL SAVIOR – that’s how much God loves us. That ***“God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all”*** – that’s how much God loves us. That Jesus carried HIS CROSS and the sins of the WORLD out to Calvary – that Jesus there was ***“pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities”*** – that’s how much God loves us. That Jesus shares with us His Easter victory over death and the grave – that trusting in Jesus we are going straight to heaven when we die – **that’s how much** God loves us. BECAUSE JESUS BORE His cross for us we can be absolutely sure of God’s love and faithfulness.

We can also be sure of God ***“working all things”*** for our eternal good. God had big plans for Joseph. He was going to use Joseph to get Egypt ready for a **severe famine** and to keep alive Jacob’s family. BEFORE that could happen Joseph needed to learn **humility** – to learn to depend on God and trust God’s **ways** and **promises** – to learn how to manage people and things. God used those years as a **slave** and **in prison** to teach Joseph those lessons. As Joseph lived though that he didn’t know HOW God was **going to work** things out. There were plenty of times Joseph was scratching his head wondering WHERE God was and WHAT God was up to.

Do we always understand God’s ways? **No!** Do we always know where God is leading us or how He’ll work things out? No! Do the paths God leads us on sometimes DISCOURAGE and **frustrate** us? Joseph wasn’t thrilled to be a **slave** or **prisoner**. But INSTEAD of trying to figure out what God **doesn’t explain** to us go to Jesus and His cross. God loves us. God keeps His promises. That’s ALL we really need to know for now. LATER we’ll see and understand.

BECAUSE JESUS **bore His cross** for us we can be absolutely sure of God’s love and faithfulness and we then...

II. We carry our crosses after Him.

“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” So we see Joseph do here. Can you imagine the fight his **sinful nature** was giving him? Pointing to how his life STANK – to how UNFAIR this all was – it would have been so easy for Joseph to become bitter – **angry** – **resentful** – to WALLOW in self-pity. Being a slave was not Joseph’s DREAM JOB. Spending years in a **foreign prison** on trumped-up charges was NOT THE LIFE Joseph had been praying for.

See Joseph ***“deny himself”*** – tell his sinful nature to “SHUT UP!” (Yes, we shouldn’t talk like that but it’s OK to talk that way to the sinful nature and the devil.) Joseph ***“crucified”*** his sinful nature and strove to be the BEST slave Potiphar had – the BEST prisoner that was locked up. Was it FUN for Joseph? No. But life is not all about HAVING FUN. We were created to GLORIFY God in all we do

and serve the good of others. **My sinful nature** doesn't want to hear that **my life** is NOT ALL ABOUT me – but rather than argue with and ignore our Savior God we are to **“deny ourselves”** and **“crucify”** the sinful nature.

“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.” He was also a young man in his **early 20s**. Here's Potiphar's wife **“day after day”** telling him, **“come to bed with me.”** You know what Joseph's sinful nature was telling him! “GO FOR IT, guy! You deserve a little fun in your lousy life. Nobody will know.” NOTICE that this went on **“day after day.”**

What can we learn here? **Obviously** there's the reminder of the 6th Commandment and God's will for us to **“be holy”** in EVERY AREA of our life – including our sex life. While society and our sinful natures may have NO PROBLEM with **lust – pornography – adultery – sleeping and living together** without being married – with divorce for **all-kinds** of reasons –with **homosexuality** – GOD HAS a problem with it. God STILL CALLS it sin and still condemns it AND those who live like that. GET OUT your catechism this week and go over all those passages under the 6th Commandment. FORGET what the world and Hollywood say – listen to GOD'S PLANS for our **sexuality** – for **marriage**. Understanding God's will – trusting God's love and faithfulness – rejoicing in God's forgiveness – ECHO Joseph's words, **“How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”**

But this isn't just about the 6th Commandment. There are ten commandments. The temptations vary FROM PERSON to person and at different stages in one's life. Depending on a person's **age/circumstances** the temptation can especially be MY PARENTS don't know anything – **later on** it can be sexual immorality – **still later** greed and MONEY and not trusting God to take care of us – then as we have more health problems it can be GRUMBLING and **complaining** about the quality of our lives. And NO MATTER what a person's age there's the temptation to IDOLATRY - to **selfishness**. FORGET GOD – it's all about me. The DEVIL KNOWS we all have sinful natures and we all have particular weaknesses and he'll try whatever to TAKE ADVANTAGE of that.

“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross DAILY and follow Me.” Joseph beat back the FIRST temptation – but one victory is **not** the WAR WON. **“Day after day”** she kept after Joseph. The devil is NO QUITTER – neither is the sinful nature. They'll work hard to just **plain** WEAR us down. We can say no 50 times but if we finally give in the 51st time we've FALLEN. We've sinned. Joseph was on his guard against his sinful nature. NOT ONLY did he **“refuse to go to bed with her”** he **“even refused to be with her.”** Do you see how you CAN APPLY that to your own particular temptations and **weaknesses**? Saying no ISN'T ENOUGH. We need to avoid as much as possible SITUATIONS that could lead to temptations.

BECAUSE JESUS BORE His **cross for us** we now carry our crosses after Him. JESUS' cross is our forgiveness – our peace with God – our sure hope of heaven. **Jesus'** cross is OUR ASSURANCE of God's love and faithfulness. **Jesus'** cross is our motivation and strength to now DAILY **“deny ourselves – take up our crosses and follow Him.”** Amen.

Sunday – “We Praise You, O God” – pages 48-49

Wednesday – Hymn #471