

# Cosmocrates

Numbers 21; Mark 4 NIV

Wars, wars, and more wars: floods; earthquakes---if you think that you have seen it all, just wait a few minutes. This big blue marble spinning around the sun never ceases to amaze; never a dull moment. If you are bored, you're not paying attention.

Friday morning, I was working in the church office when Dan Smith came in. He told me a good one that he had read in Readers Digest.

Eve accused Adam of seeing another woman. He answered, "How could I? There is no other woman."

In the middle of the night, he awoke to Eve poking him. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm counting your ribs."

That's how we are, isn't it? You would think that the reality of this fallen world would be enough, but we think up and imagine all kinds of schemes and scenarios. We question the obvious and reasonable but believe some of the most bazaar illusions invented by man. Why is that? Why do we make things more complicated than they have to be?

Maybe it has to do with the Cosmocrates. Long before there were Democrates, the Cosmocrates were, and still are, the movers

and shakers of this world. Never heard of them? Sure you have. You have dealt with them. You just don't recognize them by this title.

**<sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers ( *cosmocrates* ), against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)**

The rulers, cosmocrates, are evil forces that we humans have to contend with. And when they are in demonic form, they work through flesh-and-blood enemies.

If my understanding of this group is correct, they have been around for a long, long time. Their founder, the very first Cosmocrate, and their CEO is none other than the Devil himself.

If, indeed, at some point in their relationship, had Eve accused Adam of seeing another woman, the cosmocrates would have cheered and jeered and carved one more notch on their spiritual weapons of war.

When you woke up this morning and rolled out of you nice warm bed, did you think about the war? As you searched your well-stocked kitchen for rations, did you consider any battle strategy for

today? As you drove to worship, did you praise your CEO for dealing with the "accuser of the brethren" on your behalf? ( Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10)

It's hard to imagine and remember on a daily basis, with all of our abundance and leisure that we live in a war zone.

I'm going to use two stories in this message. The first you will probably be familiar with. The second you maybe have never heard, but the story line should be all too familiar. The choice of these stories is to position the Cross of Jesus and firmly place in the midst of our "this is how we are" personal battle scene, when ever it may occur, and where ever that may be.

The first story comes from the Bible. Numbers 21, verses 4-9, is the record of the bronze snake.

On the journey from the Land of Goshen in Egypt to the land of milk and honey in Canaan, the Israelites grew impatient and complained on more than one occasion. The complaints in Numbers 21 were against God, the servant of God, and God's provision. God handled these complaints by giving them something to really complain about.

Have you ever heard a parent say, “If you don’t stop your crying, I’m going to give you something to cry about?”

<sup>4</sup> They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea,<sup>[c]</sup> to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; <sup>5</sup> they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

The Israelites asked for the snakes to be taken away, but God didn’t take the snakes away. However, he did provide a way to deal with the snakes and their bites.

The bronze snake parallels the Cross of Christ. Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of

Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15)

Just as God provided the proper cure for impatient complaining Israel, God provided a cure for all who will humble themselves, just as Israel did, when they confessed their sin and looked upon the cure in obedience.

The second story is a little closer to our time. In a book called, *When Death Means Life, Choosing the Way of the Cross*, by Stanley Baldwin, the first chapter tells the story of a tragic situation between two warring clans in former New Guinea, who, around 1985, had ended their eye-for-an-eye wars through the efforts of missionaries, had become Christians, but lost focus and returned to their former ways.

At first, they embraced their new life with as much zeal as they once fought one another. They cooperated with one another and the missionaries to baptize, organize churches, train ministers, clear land for airstrips, and secure the area for safe travel without fear of being ambushed.

But, apparently, many of the people had ulterior motives or misguided expectations. They believed that with the gospel came *things*. The people who brought this new way had many possessions. They were expecting things to eventually begin arriving on these airstrips.

When the things they expected didn’t come; when they realized that their physical lives would continue to be hard, that they were going to continue to live in their same little houses and work hard for their food, they began to doubt and complain, and look to their past.

And finally, the eye-for-an-eye wars returned. In the beginning, they had responded to a spiritual message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the death of Jesus on the cross, but focus shifted to things; material benefits. And the result: tragedy.

Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, but his disciples didn’t understand it. Mark records his explanation beginning in 4:14.

The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”

The Cosmocrates can do a number on us in many ways. We have to constantly be on guard. The minute we stop believing that we are in a war zone, we can become a casualty.

Although these two stories are many, many years apart, the people are the same. It is so easy to lose focus, whether in hard times or good times. Israel was in a hard time and complained. The two tribes had come out of hard times to good times, but it wasn't enough. They wanted more.

That's how we are, isn't it?

Have you ever known anyone who complained constantly? Everything is either too hot, too cold, too high, too low - nothing is ever right. Are they fun to be around? Is it rewarding to do anything with them? What is it these people lack?

The Israelites complained about food and water and fighting the enemy to get to the Promised Land. Who always provided for them? God. Did he ever let them down? No. So why did they complain? Not because they lacked, but because they always wanted more.

Our society is not much different. Ads and commercials constantly try to convince us that we need something else. We lose sight of all the wonderful things we have and concentrate instead on what we don't have. We can prevent becoming complainers by constantly reminding ourselves of the things we are thankful for. We can battle a whiny mood by

counting our blessings and remembering that we are in a war zone; and we are doing quite well, considering.

The message that God wants you to prosper in everything led the tribal villagers toward material rather than spiritual 'everything.' The people returned to their hatred and war among the tribes; returned back to the lifestyle of the past. Something other than the will of God and the Cross of Christ became the focus of their life.

Between these two stories many generations of people have passed. In the midst of these generations a cross was dropped into a hole on a hill along the road, just outside of Jerusalem.

Everything that Jesus did was open for all to see and hear, even his death. Everything that his father instructed him to do was a benefit for others. The birds of the air have nests, foxes have holes, but the son of man has no place to lay his head; meaning, that Jesus didn't come to earth to live to a ripe old age - he came to die - and he died young according to today's longevity.

So, if this is how we are; never happy and always wanting what we don't have, how is a bunch like us to be saved by a just and holy God?

Jesus answered that question while talking to a man named Nicodemus: **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.”**<sup>15</sup>

**that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15)**

The shadow of the cross pointed out by Jesus to a teacher of Israel, and recorded for all to read. Don't miss it. The grumbling complainers bitten by snakes; a serpent uplifted on a pole. Sinners humble themselves, looked upon the pole and lived.

Just as the snakes were not removed, the cosmocrates have not been removed.

This record of physical salvation in the Old Testament illustrates spiritual salvation in the New Testament. In the midst of snake bitten Israel, there rises a lonely pole. In the midst of vast multitudes of human sinners—sin-bitten, dying—there rises a lonely cross. It was our Lord who said that just as the uplifted serpent was the only means of deliverance then, so the uplifted Son of Man is the only means of deliverance now.

And, the cross does more than save us from eternal separation from God. The cross has today benefits. Here is one:

In a small town in Maine there lived a young woman, who, when bitter grief came to her, shut herself off from her friends. She refused to be consoled by anyone. One day a saintly old man, also in deep sorrow, came to see her. After they had a good cry together, her broken heart began to mend.

Our wounds healed by Jesus wounds can help heal others. In our war zone, in love's service, wounded soldiers can serve.

The Son of Man was lifted up and by his wounds you can be healed and help heal others. Point them to the Cross, for the way of the Cross leads home.

So, when you wake up in the morning and roll out of your nice warm bed, remember-you live in a war zone. As you search your well-stocked kitchen for rations, consider a battle strategy for the day. As you go about your business, whatever that may be, and where ever that takes you, praise your CEO for dealing with the "accuser of the brethren" on your behalf. ( Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10)

Jesus prayed in the garden for another way- but there was no other way. If the Son of Man had not been lifted up; if Jesus humanity would have won and he had chosen another way and the Cross hadn't happened, you and I would have no chance against the merciless Cosmocrates.