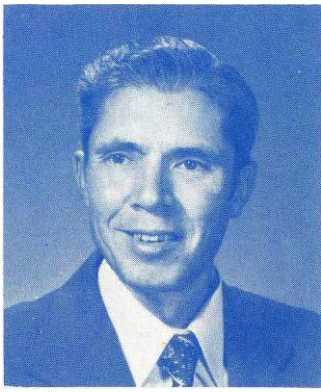


A Kaleidoscope of Diamonds
Volume Two:
The Jeweled Glories of the Cross Revealed

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A KALEIDOSCOPE OF DIAMONDS - Volume 2

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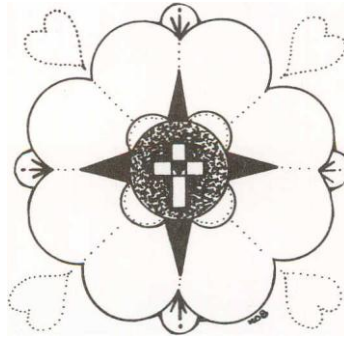
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CHAPTER 1

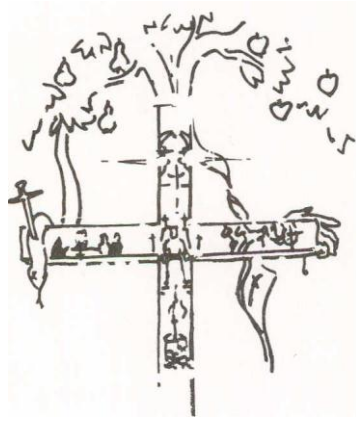
Why Focus On a Gallows?

Volume one of this set is a missionary volume – something that can be placed in the hands of any person seeking a solution to the riddle of existence. It sets forth the only answer which makes sense and which can withstand the pressures of life's variegated experiences. Only the Christian faith "wears well," and becomes authenticated in the actual living. All great books are like that – they are, so to speak, written in invisible ink, and only as their pages are held before the fire of life does their full significance appear. In the light of the tragic and ecstatic facts of existence, pain even agony, bewilderment and frustration, duty, responsibility and failure, guilt, remorse and death, as well as joy, love, hope and fulfillment, Christianity and Christianity alone, in its biblical form (not all that claims the name) matches reality. The Bible becomes alive to those on life's pilgrimage who investigate it, and becomes light, food, strength, direction, and music on the way.

Now we have come to volume two. Its theme is the cross under the kaleidoscope of faith's vision. Having a key to life is not enough. We must be motivated to use it—always, under all circumstances. The worst men know more about duty than the best man does. Information is never enough. Motivation is the great human lack—and that the Christ of Calvary, and he alone, provides. Why is it that Scripture alludes to only about one day in every three hundred of our Lord's life? Why is so little said of the Bethlehem birth, of the first thirty years of Christ's sojourn here, and of more than 99 percent of the days of his actual ministry after his baptism? Why is it that the last week of the Savior's life is given from one-third to one-half of the space in the four Gospels? The reason is plain. Spurgeon expressed it as well as anybody:

Our Lord's power to draw all men to Himself lies mainly in His death. By being lifted up from the earth upon the cross He was made to die, and so also was He made to draw all men unto Himself. There is an attractive power about our Lord's person, and about His life, and about His teaching; but, still, the main attractive force lies in His death upon the cross. Most certainly this is rare and strange; for when a great religious leader dies, a large measure of his personal power is gone Is it not strange that what is so often fatal to the influence of other men is a gain to our Lord Jesus Christ; for it is by His death that He possesses His most powerful influence over the sons of men? Because Jesus died, He is this day the mightiest ruler of human minds, the great centre to which all hearts are being drawn Herein is a wonderful thing. The Lord Jesus has lost no influence by having been hanged upon the tree; nay, rather it is because of His shameful death that He is able to draw all men unto Himself. His glory rises from His humiliation; His adorable conquest from His ignominious death Christ's death of weakness threw no weakness into Christianity; say rather that it is the right arm of her power. By the sign of suffering unto death the church has conquered, and will conquer still. By a love which is strong as death she has always been victorious, and must for ever remain so. When she has not been ashamed to put the cross in the forefront, she has never had to be ashamed; for God has been with her, and Jesus has drawn all men to Himself. The crucified Christ has irresistible attractions; when He stoops into the utmost suffering and scorn even the brutal must relent: a living Saviour men *may* love, but a 'Crucified Saviour they *must* love. If they perceive that He loved them, and gave Himself for them, their hearts are stolen away: the city of Mansoul is captured before the siege begins, when the Prince Emmanuel uncovers the beauties of His dying love before the eyes of the Rebellious ones. (*Treasury of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, pp. 483-484)

Whatever gets our attention gets us! The most important factor in our lives is what we choose to attend to. Attention brings either love or some other powerful motivator. God intends that by beholding his love reflected in the manifold imagery of the cross we shall be changed. There, then, is the purpose of this book. Read a few pages a day, it will furnish food for the soul's reflection that will lift the reader above the temptations of earth. It will provide strength for the inevitable conflicts of life, and wisdom for its perplexities. May the author and the reader prove day by day that "looking unto Jesus" on the cross *we* deserved is the supreme privilege of mortals here below, and the only road to lasting joy.



CHAPTER 2

Diamonds From Hell – The Cross Through The Kaleidoscope

Everything we do and say reflects what we are. Deeds and words reveal character. So it is with God. Uncorrupted nature was originally his garment, history is his story in parabolic acts, and later, Scripture becomes his tongue. Even nature has a message to tell for anyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see. But it is Christ on the cross who unveils God's heart, for at Calvary heaven is positively shouting.

Golgotha was hell, but a hell scintillating with diamonds. These diamonds have many facets and even a fast revolving kaleidoscope could catch only their partial beauty. Nevertheless we shall try. I know of no better way to be awakened from our spiritual slumber than by considering the jeweled testimony of Calvary.

Like the Bible, the cross has an outer form and an inner meaning. For example, the New Testament uses the story of creation as an image of redemption (Gn 1:1; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:17). And is not the story of Israel's redemption from Egypt the story of every sinner saved by grace? Every believer has symbolically left the Egypt of idolatrous bondage by the blood of the Lamb and has set off for the Promised Land nourished by the Manna of heaven and the Water of Life. This symbolism of Scripture finds its most concentrated essence at the cross. The outer form of Calvary speaks merely of a man suffering a death penalty in the days of Pontius Pilate for the crime of disturbing the peace of both religion and State. The inner meaning, however, has many layers, only some of which we have space to touch upon.

Calvary – A Diamond Mine

From the beginning of the Christian era there have been devout minds who have recognized that every detail of fact connected with the cross has transcendent significance. Alexander Maclaren when preaching on Luke 23:42 declared: "Everything of the future history of the world under the gospel is typified in the events of the crucifixion." If at Calvary the message from heaven reached its greatest intensity, we would expect the decibel levels to rise. God's revelation at this crisis point is accompanied by signs and wonders which are graphic and sharply etched, and which point to infinite truths-truths which can transform any life, however dejected, however apparently hopeless.

The events of that Black Friday were not coincidental.

The sacred hill became a vignette of all time, all places, all people and all truth. It may well bear the close scrutiny of a spiritual microscope, for the jots and tittles of heaven's proclamation at Calvary have a depth worthy of the Divine Author.

Let's take John 19:29 for an example. "A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth." Both the hyssop and the sponge offer significant hints of the comprehensiveness of Calvary's benefits. From some forest tree the cross had been taken, and at this moment of Christ's thirst, it is united with the hyssop shrub-the tiniest green growth ever reckoned as a tree, usually being no more than a foot and a half high (1 Ki 4:33). On that cross was man-the greatest, most complex form of God's original creation- now linked with the sponge-the very lowest form of animal life. Thus the cross takes in all, even the entire created order. Tree, shrub, man and sponge play out their respective roles in Golgotha's drama.

Some may question the appropriateness of this method of interpreting the symbols associated with the cross. Yet it is impossible to deny that deeper meanings exist, meanings often intended by the Gospel writers but which lie beneath the surface of the text. For instance, when we compare the close of Christ's life with its beginning, we marvel at the purposeful symmetry of it. He begins in a sealed, virgin *womb*, cared for by a just man called Joseph. Forty days after his birth, he is presented at the temple in Jerusalem. At the end of that unique life we find our Lord in a sealed virgin *tomb* cared for by another just man named Joseph. Forty days after his death, having emerged from the tomb, he ascends to the heavenly temple – the new Jerusalem above. This, also, like his first visit to the earthly Jerusalem, was for the purpose of dedication (Dan 9:24; Heb 9:11-14; 10:19, 20). The thoughtful reader of the Scriptures will find scores of other parallels which indicate the marvel of the inspired design. One finds not only a story of great wonder but also the wonder of a great story!

It was not by chance that Christ was crucified rather than Barabbas, and that Israel had to choose either Christ or Caesar as king. Nor was it by chance that the crucifixion took place at the time of the Passover redemption festival, and that the Lamb of God was placed on the center cross with a sign over his head proclaiming him king. Even the nature of his death by crucifixion with its linking of heaven and earth and the two extremes of the horizon, a bloody shameful death wherein he is stripped of his garments that his crucifiers might be clothed-all of this transcends coincidence and echoes with deep symbolic meaning. He who from eternity had been in the midst between the Father and the Spirit, came to the middle of the ancient world – Israel, the crossroads of the nations – in the midst of the ages in order to hang in the midst between two thieves. Only our own blindness causes us to miss the centrality of Christ.

Similarly, there is darkness around the cross at the time when Christ felt his Father's face withdrawn, the scattering of that darkness when he spoke again, the rending of the veil between the holy and the most holy places of the temple and the opening of the graves when he died, the twin fountains of blood and water from his riven side-all of these clearly constitute the dramatic enactment of the basic truths of the gospel.

The mighty earthquake, the intense darkness, the opened graves and the resurrection of some of the dead, the King lifted up above his subjects, dividing them (as he did the thieves) between the lost and the saved-all these point to the last great day, typified by the judgment of the cross (Jn 12:31-32).

John, who gives more space to the Passion than the other Gospel writers, uses words and phrases with double meanings. When he speaks of the "lifting up" of Christ (Jn 12:32), he means not only the physical elevation of the Savior's body, but also his glorification before the universe. When describing the exit of Judas from the Last Supper, he adds, "and it was night." It is not difficult to discern that he was conveying more than information about the time of day. He sees that the sun has set in the soul of the betrayer.

It has been evident to various commentators that John had a double meaning in mind when he portrayed the feeding of the hungry multitudes in the desert and then went on to describe Christ interceding upon a mountain (Jn 6:1-15). Later, Christ descended the same mountain to save his endangered disciples from the storm at sea (vv 16-21). All this the Spirit intended to be a depiction of the cross and

the subsequent spreading gospel message to feed the hungry multitudes, while our Lord intercedes in heaven above. He will return to rescue his threatened church from the storm at the end of the world, in the last watch of earth's dark night.

Symbols are prominent from the beginning to the end of John's Gospel. It is clearly appropriate that these symbols should increase in number and significance as John narrates the climax. In the early chapters of his Gospel we perceive John's emphasis upon such figures as the temple and the lamb of sacrifice. It is not unexpected, therefore, to find him towards the close of the story stressing the conjunction of Christ's death with the key temple event, namely, the Passover with its sacrifices of lambs commemorating the redemption from Egyptian slavery.

The above are merely random examples of the inner meanings found in the Atonement. We wish to use a spiritual kaleidoscope on Calvary, suggesting for our healing and strengthening some of the patterns which are there to be found. Certain of these patterns are clearly expressed in Scripture itself. Others illustrate the use of spiritual imagination devotionally employed and may help some but not others. If the reader is encouraged to meditate on the greatest event in time and eternity, and to seek to plumb its depths, these meditations will not be in vain. Nothing suggested here is original with this author, for all the facets of Calvary now discussed have been dwelt upon by many Christian writers over the centuries.

The Gardens of Life and Death

The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the bird for mirth,
One is nearer God's heart in a garden,
Than anywhere else on earth.

According to John 19:41, "In the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid." This is a deeply significant stroke in John's painting of Calvary. Life is a garden, but it contains the inevitable cross and tomb. Most Christians know that the New Testament repeatedly calls Christ's cross a tree. But few have observed that John is particular to say that in the very place where that tree was planted there was a garden. Just as the world began with a garden, it legally ends in a garden (Heb 1:1; 9:26; 1 Jn 2:18; 1 Cor 10:13). In a replay of earth's beginning, the cross becomes God's testing "tree of knowledge" as well as the "tree of life."

Genesis 1-3 tells of the new creation with the paradise garden at its center. In that garden is shown a man in the image of God, a son of God, the head of the race, a naked Adam, who on the afternoon of the sixth day had his side opened while he slept, in order to have a bride. John is alluding to all this as he presents the second Adam, the son of God, the head of a *new* race who atones for Adam's garden sin in another garden, and who, like the Adam of Eden, falls asleep in order that he too might have a bride—the church (Eph 5:25-33; Rev 19:7-9; Jn 19:23-27, 34, 41).

The Calvary event also takes place on the sixth day and it is late in the day when Christ falls asleep and his side is opened. Immediately after, humanity's Head rested on the first Sabbath of the new age. The only whole day Christ spent in the tomb was the Sabbath of rest, thus commemorating the new creation and the finished redemption. Observe that the key word "finished," repeated in Genesis 2:1-3, appears again in connection with the close of the Redeemer's work and at the same time (Jn 19:30). In the beginning, Christ the Creator worked six days and rested on the seventh. At passion week he does the same. And on the cross itself he endures Satanic onslaughts for six hours and enters into rest on the seventh.

The garden of Calvary continues the travail of the garden of Gethsemane where Christ's blood first began to flow. The two gardens of our Lord's sufferings thus make one and it is fruitful to compare it with the garden of Eden where man was lost and cursed as a result of his failure to trust and obey. Arthur Pink is one of many who have summarized the relationships between Gethsemane and Eden.

The contrasts between them are indeed most striking. In Eden, all was delightful; in Gethsemane, all was terrible. In Eden, Adam and Eve parleyed with Satan; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought the face of His Father. In Eden, Adam sinned; in Gethsemane, the Saviour suffered. In Eden, Adam fell; in Gethsemane, the Redeemer conquered. The conflict in Eden took place by day; the conflict in Gethsemane was waged at night. In the one, Adam fell before Satan; in the other, the soldiers fell before Christ. In Eden, the race was lost; in Gethsemane, Christ announced, "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none" (Jn 18:9). In Eden, Adam took the fruit from Eve's hand; in Gethsemane, Christ received the cup from his Father's hand. In Eden, Adam hid himself; in Gethsemane, Christ boldly showed himself. In Eden, God sought Adam; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought God. From Eden Adam was "driven"; from Gethsemane Christ was "led." In Eden the "sword" was drawn (Gen 3:24); in Gethsemane, the "sword" was sheathed (Jn 18:11).¹

The Trees of Eden and Calvary

Having compared the gardens, it is natural to compare the tree in the first garden, which was the instrument of the curse, and the tree of the cross where Christ was made a curse for us. Genesis 2:9 speaks of the first, and in Acts 5:30 and 1 Peter 2:24 we find the second. For centuries, commentators have delighted in contrasting and comparing the trees of Eden and Calvary.

Both trees are the trees of the knowledge of good and evil. At the cross we have a revelation of the goodness of God and the evil of man transcending all other disclosures. At the cross the believer finds a view pleasant to the *eye* of faith, and good for spiritual food, just as the tree in Eden was said to be pleasant to the sight and good for food. When the woman found the tree one "to be desired to make one wise" she plucked its fruit, and when we find in the cross the wisdom of God we partake of it. Concerning both trees we find that they are located "in the midst" (Gn 2:9; Jn 19:18; cf. Rev 1:13; 5:6; 22:2).

By this repeated phrase in connection with the trees of life and knowledge and with the cross of Jesus, we are reminded of the centrality of Christ and his sacrifice. The Savior of Calvary stands between God and man, between the Father and the Spirit, between life and death, between time and eternity, law and grace, judgment and mercy. The tree of life in the midst of Paradise also symbolized his cross, since to find Christ as one's sacrifice is to find paradise. Only if we keep him in the center of all beliefs and practices can all be well.

By way of contrast, we observe that God planted the first tree and man the second. Man was forbidden to partake of the Edenic tree but he is invited to eat of the second. In one case we have Satan saying in effect, "Take and eat and you will be blessed." At the communion service which prefigured his death Jesus bade his disciples, "Take, eat" that they might be healed.

While a thief stealing from the first tree was expelled from Paradise, another thief, millenniums later, was promised entrance into Paradise *because* he partook of the second tree.

On numerous occasions, Scripture refers to the cross as a tree. This is most appropriate since trees provide food and shelter; they are places of rest and beauty, and have, in themselves, the seed of continued life. In all these ways, every good tree points to the cross of Christ.

In Genesis 18:4 the tree is pictured as a place giving rest, in contrast to the previous reference to a tree which depicted it as the place of the curse (Gn 3:17). In the next passage referring to a tree (Ex 15:23-25), we find it the symbol of transformation. In 2 Kings 6:1-7 a tree branch becomes the agent of resurrection and ascension. Thus to every believer the cross is rest, transformation, resurrection and ascension (Eph 2:1-6). Calvary has transformed the tree of Knowledge of good and evil into a tree of life for all who believe.

The Cross as an Altar

Our Lord's first words from the cross were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Here we see our Lord as *intercessory priest*. A few minutes before, when women had wept over him, he had filled his *prophetic office* to the full by a final prediction about the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Lk 23:28-31). He is also shown to be a *king* by the title placed on the cross above his head. Jesus as Messiah is prophet, priest, and king. As soon as his blood spurted under the piercing nails, our Lord interceded. The cross became his altar.

The Cross as a Throne

"Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews" was the title affixed to the cross. Earlier he had been clothed in purple and given a mock scepter, while men had brazenly bowed before him. As a king he had appointed the believing thief to Paradise, and given directions regarding his mother and beloved disciple. We bow our knees before him, and our wills in submission, when we observe that even our king became obedient unto death. From the throne of the cross he still reigns over the hearts of millions, for that throne is also a magnet (Jn 12:32).

The Cross as a Judgment Bar

Christ's second word from the cross appointed the penitent thief to Paradise, and the other (by omission) to perdition. Thus our Lord's cross was also his judgment seat from which he adjudicated between the saved and the lost. Wherever Jesus is, there is a division among the people because of him (Jn 7:43).

Those who believe are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already. In John 12:31-32, Jesus described his coming crucifixion as the judgment of the world, and wherever that cross is proclaimed, men are either judged worthy of eternal life as they believe, or worthy of eternal death if they reject the appeal of infinite love. How strange yet how significant, that he who could give sight to the blind and life to the dead, who could darken the skies and calm the waters, refuses to force men into his kingdom.

The Cross as a Mercy Seat

Paul refers to the cross as a mercy seat (Rom 3:25 original). The original Greek word ("hilasterion") signifies also propitiation and expiation. As the blood-stained-mercy seat of old came between God and the broken law in the sanctuary, even now the cross intervenes between the sinner and the great Judge. Blood was sprinkled on the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant to acknowledge the righteous claims of God's eternal law. God can never take lightly its violation, yet through his own provision he is able to shelter the sinner without excusing his sin or detracting from the sacred law by a hairbreadth. The law remains a *perfect standard*, but because of our sin it can never give us a *perfect standing* before God. At the cross (our mercy seat) mercy and fidelity meet, and righteousness and peace kiss each other (Ps 85: 10). Thus God can be just as well as the justifier of the sinner (Rom 3:26). He is not only faithful in forgiving, but also just, because in welcoming back the rebel, he in no wise lessens the claims of that law which reflects his character and rule (1 Jn 1:9).

The Cross as a Triumphal Chariot

In Colossians 2:15 the cross is said to be a place of triumph where Christ defeated wicked principalities and powers. The metaphor is borrowed from the well-known Roman parade of triumph for a returning conqueror.

The Cross as Trophy, Ensign, Rod, Etc.

As we continue to turn our spiritual kaleidoscope, the cross can be seen as many other things as well. It is the trophy of the Conqueror of death, like the staff of Elisha which resurrected the dead child after being laid upon him (2 Ki 4:18-37). It is the ensign of the Captain of our salvation, like the spear of Joshua stretched forth over the city of Ai before its fall (Jos 8:18). It is the rod of divine justice against sinners, for what befell Christ will befall all who reject him. Thus it is the axe laid at the root of the barren tree, foretold by John the Baptist (Lk 3:9).

Looking at the cross, we see Aaron's rod which budded denoting the true priesthood. We see the rod of Moses which resulted from taking the serpent by the tail and which parted the Red Sea of death, destroying Pharaoh and rescuing Israel. We see the ark of Noah which saved his family from the deluge of wrath. We see also the ark of the law enshrining God's sacred rule of right.

The Cross as a Pulpit

The cross was also a pulpit from which Christ gave his greatest sermon, just seven sentences apparently detached from one another, but actually forming a beautiful unity and a spiritual masterpiece. To that sermon we will turn in chapters six and seven.

REFERENCE

1. John (Grand Rapids, 1974), 3:157-58.



CHAPTER 3

Snapshots of the Calvary Drama (Part One)

The Place, the Time, the Manner, and the Man

The Place

According to Ezekiel 5:5, Palestine, the land-bridge between the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, is the center of the earth. Jerusalem is Palestine's center, and there Christ was put to shame for us. At Golgotha ("place of the skull") our Lord was publicly treated as refuse. The Latin name of the place was "Calvary," and it means the same. Probably the site got its name from the skulls and dead bones which remained there after the former crucifixions as though it had been a charnel house. At this site death itself appeared in the most disgusting shape. Only the most abject of all men ended their days on Golgotha. Thus Christ became for us – "a worm and no man."

A Skull "Outside the Gate"

A skull is an empty head and Christianity is foolishness to them that perish, because the wicked cannot understand a love so intense as to consent to complete self-emptying. But for the believer Golgotha represents the wisdom of God where the Head of the church gave himself for all. It should remind us that not only by creation, but by redemption "the head of every man is Christ" (1 Cor 11:3). He is also "the head of all principality and power."

The place of execution is further described as being "outside the gate" (Heb 13:12). Beyond the city was the place for lepers and for garbage. Here Christ went for our sakes to the place of shame and rejection and pain. Christ "suffered" "outside the gate." Ultimately all who are lost will suffer outside the Holy City, according to Revelation 20:9. Those who do not accept what once happened outside Jerusalem must themselves repeat that tragic death.

Christ died under the open expanse of heaven, not under a roof or in a temple. Thus it was symbolized that he became a spectacle to all, including the angels in heaven, that he suffered not only for the Jews but for the whole world. He was suspended in the air and his blood drops moistened the earth, symbolizing the cleansing of all creation.

Outside the city Christ faced west where his gospel would soon spread. There was a thoroughfare nearby representing the earth in which earth's pilgrims are confronted by the cross as they journey through life. Most pilgrims mock, but some observing the One on the cross confess, "Surely this is the son of God" (Mt 27:54).

Calvary at Jerusalem is the very hill of Moriah where Isaac was offered up centuries before. Remember that the child of promise miraculously born was under the sentence of death for three days, and traveled with his father bearing on his back the wood on which he was to be sacrificed. Now the true Isaac has come, and to show that, he is offered at the same site. He too can say, "The Father has not left me alone. He that sent me is with me."

Long before Isaac, Noah had offered sacrifices adjoining the saving wood of the ark after emerging from the storm of the wrath of God. That sacrifice had been the symbolism of a new covenant made with a new world. So it was at Calvary. The fierce outpouring of divine wrath against evil fell on the One attached to Calvary's tree that it might never fall on us.

God's wrath, of course, is not like ours, selfish and ungovernable. His is a holy wrath, the inevitable reaction of holiness against evil, and it is a healing wrath which brings salvation and holiness to all who are in sympathy with it. Whenever wrath threatens, there is the ark of safety available to all who accept the invitation to "come."

So much for the *place* of the Atonement – the place of the new Noah, the new ark, and the new covenant. What about the time?

The Time

"When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal 4:4).

Mankind had come to its end sociologically, philosophically, and religiously, when Christ came. Says the poet about the Roman empire:

On that hard pagan world disgust and secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust had made of life a hell.

Most men were slaves, and women and children were but chattels. Infanticide was a common practice, and suicide was pandemic. The religions of Egypt, Babylon, and Greece, as well as the philosophies of Athens, had all been tried and found wanting. Then and not till then did God come.

Every year for fifteen centuries, on the fourteenth day of the first month, Israel slew her Passover lambs between three and six o'clock, With bitter herbs and unleavened bread the flesh was eaten to commemorate deliverance from Egypt, when the firstborn of the captor died, but Israel's firstborn lived.

And now at this identical time the Lamb of God was slain, commemorating a greater redemption than that of Egypt. And we, with the bitter herbs of contrition and the unleavened bread of life (freedom from cherished sin), feed on the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world. As the lamb was slain while the Israelites were still in Egypt, Christ died for our sins "while we were yet sinners," "without strength," and "enemies" (Rom 5:6-11). Christ was thirty-three when he died, and the timing here is marvelously appropriate. After the early thirties, death and decay begin to make their inroads. But Christ, as the sacrifice without spot or blemish, offered himself before deterioration of age touched him. He was the perfect oblation indeed!

It was on the sixth day that our Lord died—the day the first Adam was born and the serpent also. On the sixth day of redemption's Passion Week, our Lord finished his work again, and entered into the rest of the holy Sabbath. Before the sunset, the side of the second Adam was opened that the streams of blood and water might make possible the birth of the church, his Eve.

That Friday night showed the glory of a full moon, after the eclipse putting out of the light of the sun, emblematic of the church now seen in her Lord's fullness because he, the Sun of righteousness, has emptied himself for her.

Daniel, the prophet, had foretold that from the time of the restoration of the city and the temple there would be ten Jubilees until the coming of the Messiah, and that he would be cut off after half a week of years in order that transgression might be finished, sin ended, iniquity atoned for, everlasting righteousness brought in, the prophetic word sealed by fulfillment and the temple of God in heaven and earth (the new Jerusalem and the church) anointed by the Holy Spirit's effusion (Dan 9:24-27). So it transpired.

The Day of Atonement was the day on which at the fiftieth year the Jubilee was proclaimed by the blowing of trumpets. Calvary was the Atonement in reality, ushering in the true Jubilee of eternal salvation. All this Christ anticipated when he proclaimed at the opening of his ministry "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18).

Christ came and announced the great Jubilee, ten Jubilees after the establishment of the Holy City and temple. He announced the kingdom of God into which all who believed pressed by the violence of faith commemorating their personal Jubilee of freedom and rejoicing (Mt 11:12). The process of establishment of the church by Christ took three and a half years—a broken seven — emblem of his unrest while rejected by sinners, that we who rejected and crucified him might find rest.

"Seventy sevens," Daniel had predicted, would pass before Christ would be "cut off" that the great Sabbath of man's perfect rest in Christ might dawn. To this each weekly Sabbath witnesses as Hebrews 4:3 reminds us. "We who have believed do enter into rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Immediately prior to the New Testament's first record of Christ's Sabbath reforms, we have the great invitation "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

The Pattern of the Week

Daniel had divided his seventy weeks of years into seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week—an evening, a night, and a glorious dawning. Thus he used the Sabbath pattern of the first creation to point to the coming of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). In the Gospel record of Luke, we find the whole narrative revolving around seven Sabbath pericopes, climaxing in that great Sabbath when our Lord rested from his work of redemption that the holy day might commemorate the saving death of the second Adam as well as the birth of the first.

Each week of time (for the week is an institution founded only on the revelation of Scripture) commemorates the calendar of creation and redemption, and is taken for granted in the New Testament as sacrosanct for Christians.

The Manner

The implement and manner of death at Calvary, as well as the place and the time, are highly symbolic. The raised victim was one rejected by heaven and earth. He was stripped naked for he owned nothing and was but the object of shame and obloquy. Crucifixion is not death but unto death. Every moment seemed an aeon as the Infinite One suffered for the millenniums of human sin. When we recognize who it was that hung on the tree at Calvary, we discern more and more layers of meaning in the manner of the execution. The very shape of the cross — extending above, below, and on either side—suggests the height, depth, length, and breadth of the love of Christ (Eph 3:18). Pointing to heaven from which the Sufferer came, but rooted in the earth he came to redeem, the outstretched arms on the transverse beam constitute an invitation to all mankind to come and be embraced by divine love. Man may reject an angry deity, but how can he reject one who, while suffering for him, smiles and leans forward with outstretched arms of welcome?

Daniel had dreamed of a tree filling the whole earth and becoming the source of food and rest for all creatures. Such a tree is the cross. Like Aaron's rod that budded, this wood also appears lifeless but buds nevertheless, and brings forth fruit, unceasing fruit throughout time and eternity. It is the rod of the true Priest, the real Aaron and Melchizedec.

We may not agree with what all the ancients have seen in the symbolism of Calvary, but consideration of their reflections can yield rich fruit. Take, for instance, the conclusions of the Latin Church Fathers, Austin and Theophylact, quoted by Isaac Williams:

"It was by the wisdom of God, says St. Austin, undertaken for our example, that we might not only not fear death, but even no kind of death; for among all kinds of death, none was more execrable and more dreadful than this." And in another place he says, "observe of what great virtue is the Cross; Adam despised the command, taking the apple from the tree; but what Adam hath lost, Christ hath found on the Cross. An ark of wood delivered mankind from the deluge of waters. When the people of God were departing from Egypt, Moses with a rod divided the sea, overthrew Pharaoh and ransomed the people of God. The same Moses sent the wood into the water and turned the bitter water into sweetness. By the rod of wood, the saving wave is brought forth from the Spiritual Rock. And it was not without the rod that Amalek was overcome, when Moses was stretched forth with his extended hands; and the Law of God is committed to the ark of the Covenant made of wood; that by all of these, as it were through certain steps, they might arrive at length at the wood of the Cross." And Theophylact observes to this effect, that "from the tree, and from the pleasure resulting therefrom, came death; and from the Tree, and from the pains thereon sustained, came life." Thus did the Lord, like Moses, seize the old Serpent, from which human nature fled, and it hath become a rod in his hand, the rod of God, with which He will work wonders in the land of Egypt; delivering His chosen out of the house of bondage, and dividing the sea as a way for His ransomed to pass over.¹

In the instrument of human and satanic hate we see also the sword of God. Its point is downward and the hilt is above towards heaven as if in the hand of the great Judge. It pierces the earth and the serpent that crawls thereon, also nailing and burying the note of man's indebtedness for sin (Col 2:14).

The Cross in Israel

From all eternity the cross was planned and designed.

Angels beholding the camp of Israel in the wilderness saw the cross. There were three tribes to the north, three to the south, three to the west, and three to the east, but only four principal standards at the points of the compass. And in the heart of the encampment was the sanctuary whose furniture, if linked by straight lines, projects a cross.

Krummacher has written beautifully on the significance of the manner of our Lord's death:

There stands the mysterious cross – a rock against which the very waves of the curse break, a lightning-conductor, by which the destroying fluid descends, which would otherwise have crushed the world. He who so mercifully engaged to direct this thunderbolt against himself, hangs yonder in profound darkness. Still he remains the Morning Star, announcing an eternal Sabbath to the world. Though rejected by heaven and earth, yet he forms, as such, the connecting link between them both, and the Mediator of their eternal and renewed amity. Ah see! his bleeding arms are extended wide; he stretches them out to every sinner. His hands are pointed to the east and west; for he shall gather his children from the ends of the earth. The top of the cross is directed toward the sky; far above the world will its effects extend. Its foot is fixed in the earth; the cross becomes a wondrous tree, from which we reap the fruit of an eternal reconciliation.... There stands erected the standard of the new covenant, which, when it is understood, spreads terror around it no less than delight, and produces lamentation no less than joy and rejoicing. It stands to this day, and will stand forever, and no more fears those who would overturn it than the staff of Moses feared when those of the magicians hissed around it. And wherever it is displayed, there it is surrounded by powerful manifestations and miraculous effect. We carry it through the nations, and without a blow of the sword, conquer one country after another, and one fortress after another.... The cross is carried through the land and beneath its shade the soil becomes verdant and the dead revive. When this wondrous cross is exhibited, with a correct exposition of its hieroglyphic characters, "lightnings, thunderings, and voices" are wont to proceed. Stones melt in its vicinity, rocks rend before it, and waters, long stagnant, again ripple, clear and pure, as if some healing angel had descended into them.

...

It arches itself, like a rainbow, over our darkness, and precedes us on our path of sorrow like a pillar of fire. O that its serene light might also shine upon our path through this vale of tears, and as the tree of liberty and of life, strike deep its roots in our souls. Apprehended by faith, may it shed its heavenly fruit into our lap, and warm and expand our hearts and minds beneath its shade.²

The Man

"Behold the man," said the Roman judge pointing to Christ. Thus he answered his own previous question, "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38). Christ is the truth, and that truth is made evident in his death and resurrection, as well as in his life and teaching. He is the only one who ever lived whose character and experience were sketched long before his birth! *The Biblical Illustrator* in commenting upon John 19:30 aptly uses the following from C. H. Spurgeon:

I will give the Old Testament to any wise man living and say, Go home and construct in your imagination an ideal character who shall exactly fit all that which is herein foreshadowed. Remember, he must be a prophet like unto Moses, and yet a champion like unto Joshua; he must be an Aaron and a Melchisedec; he must be both David and Solomon, Noah and Jonah, Judah and Joseph. Nay, he must not only be the lamb that was slain and the scapegoat that was not slain, the turtle dove and the priest that slew the bird, but he must be the altar, tabernacle, mercy-seat, and shewbread. Nay, to puzzle this wise man further, we remind him of prophecies so apparently contradictory that one would think they could never meet in one man. Such as these, "All men shall fall down before Him," &c., and "He is despised," &c. He must begin by showing a man born of a virgin mother, He must be a man without spot or blemish, but one upon whom the Lord doth lay the iniquities of us all. He must be a glorious One, a Son of David, yet a root out of a dry ground. Now if the greatest intellects could set themselves to invent another key to the types and prophecies they could not do it. These wondrous hieroglyphics must be left unexplained till one comes forward and proclaims, "the Cross of Christ and the Son of God incarnate." Then the whole is clear, so that he who runs may read, and a child may understand.

Old Testament Pictures of the Man of Calvary

Remembering the previous quotation from Spurgeon we may say of the man of Galilee:

He is the true Adam, the true Moses, the true prophet, priest and king; he is Adam, the head of the race, the image of God, the representative of all men who falls asleep and has his side opened on the sixth day that he might have a bride; he is Abel the good Shepherd who, while yet young, was murdered by his brother because his works were righteous; he is Noah who builds a refuge from the wrath of God and thus saves his family; he is Isaac, the beloved child of promise who, under the sentence of death for three days ascended to Moriah (same place as Jerusalem), carrying the wood on his back upon which he was to be offered; he is Joseph, most beloved son, who is betrayed by his brethren for pieces of silver to the Gentiles who carry him down to Egypt and ultimately down into a prison from whence, after saving one, he rose to save millions by the bread of life, and was ultimately made lord over all the land; he is Moses the law-giver, prophet, and deliverer, who left a palace to redeem his people, a stubborn, stiff-necked generation – Moses who controlled the waters, and nourished his people by miraculous food and drink, was willing to be blotted out for the sins of the people and died while his eyesight was not dimmed nor his strength diminished. He also was resurrected and ascended to heaven.

He is Aaron the great high priest wearing the names of his people on his heart and on his shoulders; he is Joshua leading his people into the promised land; he is Boaz, Ruth's kinsman-redeemer giving her rest and fruitfulness; he is Samson by his death destroying the enemies of his people; he is David the warrior who never lost a battle when leading God's people, whose name means beloved and who was born in Bethlehem, and as a young man overcame the giant of evil; he is Solomon the wisest and richest of men who built the temple of God; he is Jonah who is taken from the wood and cast into the deep where he remained for three days prior to resurrection.

The Cross Biography

In the cross we find our Savior's biography. The wood is the table on which it is written, his flesh is the parchment, the nails the quill, and his blood the ink. But it is our biography also. His brow is pierced because of our evil thoughts, his hands are nailed because of the wrong things our hands have done, his feet are rigid to the tree because of the evil places we have wandered in, his back is raw because of the idolatrous gods we have borne, his side is open near his heart because we have loved so foolishly. He is shamed because we merit only shame.

This Man sums up creation, the fall, redemption, and the new creation. All the marks of the Fall are seen in this Passion story about the only true man who (apart from Adam) has ever lived. "Thorns... shall the earth bring forth" Adam was told after his transgression, so the second Adam wears thorns. "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread" was part of the sentence upon Adam. Thus in Gethsemane our

Lord sweats blood. "*Cursed* art thou...." are words spoken amid the shadows of Eden, and Christ became "a curse for us." Adam became *naked* when the Spirit left him, and on the cross our Lord is shamed that he might represent us who have not a stitch of righteousness. "In *sorrow* shalt thou conceive" is the verdict upon the woman Eve, and Christ at Calvary is seen as a man of sorrows that a new Eve might be born – the church of God. Because of their transgression, the first couple were *separated* from Eden and from God. Our Lord too was separated, by our imputed guilt, from the joy of the Father's presence, crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Finally, *the sword of death* marked the dividing line between Eden and the cursed world. And that sword was thrust into the side of our Substitute on Calvary.

Who is this Man on the cross? He prays for his murderers, he promises a penitent thief Paradise, he remembers and provides for his mother and his best friend, he washes the glory out of the sun by his blood, and when he trembles under sin, the earth shakes. When his flesh is torn, the veil of the temple is also. When he speaks in triumph, the darkness recedes, but he who could rule the waters, and multiply the loaves and raise the dead would not force faith upon the unwilling.

Who is this Man? There are seven testimonies to his innocence representing a perfect universal testimony. "Have nothing to do with this just man," warns Pilate's wife. "I have betrayed innocent blood," cries Judas in the agony of remorse. Pilate reluctantly admits, "I find no fault in him," and he quotes Herod likewise. "This man hath done nothing amiss," expostulates the penitent thief, and a little later the witnessing centurion adds, "Certainly this man was innocent." And the crowd beating their breasts after Christ's death agreed.

Innocent? Yes. Righteous? Yes. Loving? Yes. Why then does he suffer? The penitent whose hearts have been struck by the rod of the cross that tears might flow-they know why and give witness accordingly:

The condemnation was thine, that the justification might be mine; the agony was thine, that the victory might be mine; the pain was thine, that the ease might be mine; the stripes thine, that the healing balm issuing from them might be mine; the vinegar and gall thine, that the honey and the sweet might be mine; the curse was thine, that the blessing might be mine; the crown of thorns was thine, that the crown of glory might be mine; the death was thine, that the life purchased by it might be mine; thou didst pay the price, that I might enjoy the inheritance.³

Observe how his sacred body is now all one wound.

Why is it so? Because every part of our body ministers to evil. In Isaiah 1:5, 6 we read God's indictment of us all:

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds;...

As one has written long ago:

He wore that mock crown on account of our ambition; and the thorns of which it was made were on account of those worldly cares in us which choke the good seed. His ears were full of reproaches on account of our love of flattery; his face was defiled with spitting on account of our personal vanity which leads to so much sorrow and sin. For the abuse of our liberty, He is bound to the pillar; for the pollution of our hands His are pierced with nails; and for our feet that have gone astray, His are bleeding, his shame and nakedness is to atone for our vain and false excuses; the lying accusations that are poured on Him are for our unkind reproaches of each other, and His tongue is dried up for our evil language. For our desires to be glorified and admired in the assemblies of men He is brought forth by Pilate in derision and scorn....⁴

And another says:

He deigns to be spit upon who healed the blind man with his spittle. He is crowned with thorns who covers the martyrs with unfading flowers; He is stripped of His earthly robe who clothes us with robes of righteousness and of immortality; He receives gall to eat who feeds us with heavenly manna; He received vinegar to drink who gives us the cup of salvation; He who is innocent is numbered with transgressors; He who is the truth is opposed by false witnesses; the Judge of all is judged; the eternal word of God is led forth as a victim and He holds his peace.⁵

And from Augustine:

Man's Maker was made man that the Lord of the Stars might nurse at His mother's breast; that the Bread might be hungry, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired from the journey, that the Truth might be accused by false witnesses ... the Teacher beaten with whips, the Vine be crowned with thorns, the Foundation be hung on a tree, that Strength might be made weak, that He who heals might be wounded, that Life might die.⁶

The Cross Typified Throughout Christ's Life and Ministry

No wonder then that the shadow of the cross attended our Lord's life from Bethlehem to the grave. When Holman Hunt pictured the child Jesus running with outstretched arms towards his mother he significantly made the boy's shadow a cross.

He was born in the place where the sacrificial animals were sheltered. Only the ceremonially clean creatures were permitted there. On the eighth day his first blood was shed in the ceremony of circumcision, but a little later Herod's soldiers conducted a bloody massacre of children in the tiny village.

When he began his ministry, his first miracle prefigured his last work-water was turned to wine, the symbol of blood shed for our gladness. When he cleansed the temple and the Jews threatened him, he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Not long afterwards he spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity for the Son of man to be lifted up as had been the molten serpent for the healing of Israel long ago.

There came a day when he broke loaves that the hungry multitude might be fed. After that he ascended to the mountaintop to intercede for his disciples, as a year later he would ascend to heaven as priest, following the offering of himself as the bread of life for the world. From the mountain he came down to still the storm on Galilee, which threatened to destroy his disciples in the little ship. So one day he will return from heaven when the church is threatened with extinction by the wrath of men and devils.

One week before his death he accepted an invitation to a party (Jn 12:1-11). Here a woman breaks a very expensive flask of ointment over

him and the house is filled with the fragrance. So at Calvary he is broken that the fragrance of his offering might fill the universe. The cross was no surprise to Jesus. He had it coming to him – in a different sense to that we usually use. It came to him for our sakes and it brings the glorious aroma of the love of God.

Now because of this man, all is different. God is reconciled. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." It is right for God to forgive now because his Man has taken away the sin of the world – yours and mine and everybody's. "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom 5:19). God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). "Whosoever will may come," and "he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Jn 6:37). The terrors of hell have been dissipated. And also the terror of death.

Had Christ evaded death, who would have dared to face it?

He has changed Jordan's streams into still waters, and its banks to green pastures. Death fixed its sting in Christ, and left and lost it there. Thus Christ's cross is our Alpha and Omega, glowing with law and gospel, comfort and restraint, power and peace; it is the new Tree of life in the midst of life's wilderness.⁷

The Blood

Christianity has been accused of being a butcher's shop religion. The accusation is understandable though wrong. Again and again the Scripture uses the metaphor of blood in speaking of the significance of the sacrifice of Christ. But it is a metaphor. Blood symbolizes life poured out, and in this instance the figure says in effect: God took human nature in order to die as a man for man.

Observe how the New Testament traces blessing after blessing to the shed blood of the Savior.

Forgiveness "... we have ... through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).

Peace "... having made peace through the blood of his cross ..." (Col 1:20).

Access "Having therefore, brethren, ... boldness to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, ... let us draw near" (Heb 10:19, 22).

Cleansing and Preparation for Service

"How much more shall the blood of Christ ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb 9: 14)

Sanctification "Jesus, also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb 13:12).

Redemption "Redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ. ..." (1 Pet 1:18, 19).

Victory "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 12:11).

Nourishment "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (Jn 6:55).

Communion "He that ... drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (Jn 6:56).

Eternal Life "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:54).

The blood is but the symbol of the sacrificed life of our Lord. Upon it all our hopes depend and upon it all our faith must rest.

The Blood Pointed to the Antitype of the Sacrifices

It is obvious that there are ways to die which do not involve blood-shedding. One can be poisoned, strangled, etc. But divine providence purposely selected a bloody death to emphasize that the event was a sacrifice. Christ had bled in Gethsemane, when flogged at his trial, and now at Golgotha blood oozes from his hands, feet and his pierced brow and finally pours from his side in a small torrent. How could God more clearly testify to the fact that Christ was the antitype of the whole Jewish sacrificial system? He was the burnt offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering, the lamb of the passover, the red heifer slain and burned that the polluted might be cleansed. He is also the temple which was the house of blood, and the priest who was the servant of blood. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life," "and without shedding of blood there is no remission" of sin" (Rom 6:23; Heb 9:22).

Consider the first seven references to blood in Scripture. They contain a summary of the merits and meaning of Christ's outpoured life on our behalf.

Genesis 4:10. Blood speaks. Abel's blood called for vengeance, but Christ's blood calls for forgiveness (see Heb 12:24).

Genesis 9:4. The blood is sacred. To despise Christ's blood is to invite judgment and death.

Genesis 37:31, 32. The blood is presented to the Father.

Genesis 42:22. There will be a reckoning with reference to the blood and our relationship to it.

Genesis 49:11. The blood of the grape represents the cleansing blood of Christ and must be applied to the garments which are symbolic of our characters.

Exodus 4:9. Blood is a sign of the wrath of God as well as of the salvation of God.

Exodus 12:13. Only blood can shelter us from the avenging angel. All who were under the blood were safe, and it was God's estimate of the blood that made them so.

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CHAPTER 4

Snapshots Of the Calvary Drama (Part Two)

The Sacrifice and the Spectators

The Wounded Side

After Christ's death, a heathen weapon pointed to the broken heart of the Divine Sacrifice.

While the lance thrust into our Lord's side was the last event on Calvary prior to his being taken down from the cross, we mention it here because of the stream of blood which flowed from the wounded side. (Compare this section with the discussion of blood sacrifice in the concluding pages of the previous chapter).

The Scripture in John 19:32-34 links together the wholeness of Christ (not a broken bone), and the final wounding of him who was the first of the crucified three to die. John ties the providential preservation of Christ from the fate which overtook the thieves, the breaking of their legs, to the symbolism of the passover lamb of which not one bone was permitted to be broken (Ex 12:46). The intent is clear—Christ was a perfect atonement, whole and undivided, and those who appropriate him must do so entirely. But the piercing of the side is even more notable. In dead bodies blood coagulates, but from the corpse of Christ it miraculously flows, and in a stream distinct from the accompanying water. To John, and to most Christians ever since, the twin streams represent the essential blessings of salvation—the justifying and sanctifying powers of the blood of the Savior. While water cleanses, blood atones, and all true Christian experience knows both the imputation and the impartation of righteousness.

Observe closely that in the symbolism the streams are distinct but not separate. The reason has been well explained by W. H. Griffith Thomas:

Justification is also different from making righteous, which ... is Sanctification. The two are always inseparable in fact, but they are assuredly distinguishable in thought, and must ever be distinguished if we would have peace and blessing. Justification concerns our standing, Sanctification our state. The former affects our position, the latter our condition. The first deals with judicial relationship, the second with spiritual fellowship. We must ever remember that they are bestowed together, that is, a complete Justification and a commencing Sanctification; "where the righteousness of Christ adheres, the grace of Christ inheres", where the one is imputed, the other is imparted; where the one is reckoned, the other is received. *But they must never be confused.* The first is the foundation of our peace — "Christ for us." The second is the basis of our purity — "Christ in us." Justification is concerned with acceptance; Sanctification with attainment. Sanctification admits of degrees; we may be more or less sanctified. Justification has no degrees, but is complete, perfect, final — "Justified from *all* things" (Acts 13:39).¹

The hymn writer saw these truths clearly when he wrote:

Let the water and the blood,
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse us from its guilt and power.

To understand the meaning of this final sign at Calvary is to know the secret of soul peace. God loves us and receives us solely because of the merits of the death of Christ. If we are trusting in those merits, neither all nor any of our failures imperils our perfect standing and full acceptance with God. Sing!

The Sacrificial Lamb

Think also of the lamb throughout Scripture—the innocent, helpless symbol of the sacrificial Son of God. Observe that there was first a lamb *for the individual*. Genesis 3 pictures guilty Adam being clothed by the skins of a sacrifice. Next we find the lamb avails *for an entire family* (Ex 12). Thirdly, the lamb becomes effectual *for the nation* (Lev 1). At the opening of his ministry Christ was set forth as "the lamb of God which takes away the sin *of the world*" (Jn 1:29). Ultimately we find that the Lamb reigns over *the whole universe* and is the center of its adoration and worship (Rev 5:6, 13; 22:1).

Tears and blood move us as little else can. At the tomb of Lazarus, Christ shed tears, but as in Gethsemane he contemplated the whole race dead in trespasses and sins, he wept blood from his whole body. He loved us so much, not only to weep for us but to bleed for us. This is the meaning of the emphasis on the blood. Until we realize that at every step Christ is substituting for us, we will not appreciate the meaning of the cross. The blood testifies to a love stronger than life itself. Blood is ever the sign and seal of God's covenant and grace with man (see Heb 9 and 10).

Consider the sevenfold emphasis on the sacrificial lamb throughout Scripture.

Genesis 3:21 — The lamb typified. Its garments clothe the sinner.

Genesis 22:1-14 — The lamb prophesied. Only God can provide the real sacrifice.

Exodus 12: 13 — The lamb's blood applied. It saves from wrath.

Isaiah 53:7 — The lamb personified. The Messiah pictured as a lamb.

John 1:29 — The lamb identified. Jesus is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 5:6-14 — The lamb magnified.

Revelation 22:1 — The lamb glorified.

We err unless we perceive that first of all the blood speaks to God himself. Contrary to those who think Christ only died to melt our hearts, Scripture affirms that God could not forgive us righteously unless the penalty of sin-death-was paid. Thus even in the Old Testament the blood is spoken of as ever being sprinkled "before the Lord" (Lev 4:16, 17). It was when God in the Shekinah saw the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat of the most holy place (to which only the high priest had rare access) that Israel's sins were forgiven (see Rom 3:25).

The Spectators

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" asks the Negro spiritual. Yes, we were there, we were all there. The nails may have been forged in hell, but we drove them in. The thorns may have come from a Judean hillside, but we gathered and plaited them. He was there because "he loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Observe the three groups and the three attitudes. There was obvious apathy, sympathy, and antipathy. There were those who loved him like Mary and John, those who hated him like the Pharisees, and those who didn't care about him one way or another like the soldiers.

The scene consisted of Jews and Gentiles, religious and pagan, black (as a North African, Simon of Cyrene may have been) and white, learned (like the scribes) and the unlearned, male and female, rich and poor, free and bond, young and old. The whole world was there in miniature. We are all gathered before the cross as before the throne of the King of the universe and his judgment bar. We are all confronted by this greatest scandal in time and eternity, and our destiny depends on how we react to it. Some that day, as every day since, were changed by beholding. That day the thief on the right repented, the centurion acknowledged Christ as the Son of God, many smote their breasts in penitence. Others were hardened and placed where even the pleading Spirit of God could never reach them. The same sun that softens wax hardens clay. Christ is either a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. He that is not with him is against him. For those who consider the scene with open heart and eyes, the Love Incarnate in the central figure will do what nothing else in heaven or earth can do. The cross is the wonder-working rod that strikes the rocky heart and brings forth the lifesaving streams of penitence. "Today if ye hear his voice, harden not your hearts" for "Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time" (Ps 95:7-8; Heb 3:15; 2 Cor 6:2).

Mary and Rizpah

One of the spectators is the mother of Jesus. Her name signifies bitterness. At her child's birth it had been foretold that a sword would pierce her own heart. That prophecy is here fulfilling. The scene is reminiscent of an Old Testament tragedy where Rizpah, the mother of children hung on trees in Gibeah took sackcloth and spread it across a rock from which to keep her vigil by the condemned. From the beginning of harvest until the winter rains set in, Rizpah warded off birds and beasts of prey. To Mary, her time of standing by her crucified son seemed longer, even an eternity. Her suffering was to some extent like his, qualitative more than quantitative. She wards off the specters of doubt and fear, and according to the record, continues to "stand" firm, dignified and loving. Like him, she refused to curse or call for God's vengeance. Thus she "expiated" the sin of her mother Eve, who while standing at the foot of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, cursed the whole race through her disobedience.

The Gamblers

The soldiers cast lots for the seamless tunic of Christ. They were gamblers. But so are we all. It is impossible to avoid gambling, whether we like it or not. Being born was a risk, and so is all living. When we choose our profession, that's a risk indeed, for we may err and ruin our lives. Marriage is a risk, and everybody knows what that means. Even the bringing of children into the world is a gamble. In fact, there is nothing good that is not attended with risk. We must gamble – we have no choice.

Did God gamble when he permitted the people to choose between Christ and Barabbas? Did he gamble in sending Christ to this world? Was Christ a gambler also? Studdert Kennedy answered "yes." Observe his words.

And, sitting down, they watched Him there.
The soldiers did;
There, while they played with dice,
He made His sacrifice,
And died upon the Cross to rid God's world of sin.
He was a gambler too, my Christ
He took His life and threw
It for a world redeemed
And ere His agony was done,
Before the westering sun went down,
Crowning that day with its crimson crown,
He knew that he had won.

We speak not of what the world calls gambling, that addiction which is more dangerous perhaps than even alcoholism. We speak of the apparent risks involved in being truly Christian. To follow Christ means to risk scorn, reproach and persecution. You may, like Paul, be accounted mad. The day may come when you are cast out of the synagogues for Christ's sake by those who think they are doing God service. But remember, if you wish to win anything worth the winning, you must hazard that which you value.

Gambling is never dull. Following Christ is the most exciting thing in the world. But when you gamble, make sure it is him you are following, and not your own pet eccentricities. Test your hunch by the Word, remembering that debatable options of importance should not be decided by impulse. When the Spirit of God brings conviction, then make haste without tarrying for any.

When Kagawa, that great Japanese Christian, was convicted by God of his duty, he surrendered his wealth and social position in order to obey. Behold him loading his goods into a wheelbarrow and pushing them into a despicable slum-his chosen place of service. After sixteen years of sacrificial service which nearly wrecked his health, he became a world figure of inestimable Christian influence. This has been the way for all the saints that God has called to special service. What are you risking for the Christ who risked all for you?

The Women by the Cross

Scripture goes out of its way to remark that when Christ died "there were women looking on afar off," and even some names are recorded, while we have no cluster of males named. The New Testament gives special emphasis to the role of Christian women. Elizabeth, Mary,

Martha, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, Lydia, and the women referred to by Paul illustrate this point. We are surely meant to learn that in this gospel age, women have an important place.

How remarkable to find that never in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John does one woman speak against Christ. Even the wife of a heathen governor enters the list on his behalf. Let Christians never forget that the cross has dissolved all barriers. There is now neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female – as regards status before God (see Gal 3:28).

On the other hand, the scene at Calvary also testifies prophetically to the passive service of love given by women in all ages. Helpless, the women at the cross stood through the entire doleful tragedy, their mute sympathy giving strength to the Man on the center cross. So mothers, wives, sisters without number, when unable to bring deliverance to loved ones, have nevertheless testified through the centuries by their courageous standing near in faith, patience, prayer, and empathy.

Caiaphas

Was he there in the crowd around the cross? He is not mentioned, but the chief priests are (Mk 15:31). In their persons, at least, he was there.

One of the most graphic narratives in the New Testament is the account of the interview between Jesus and Caiaphas (Mt 26:57-66). The latter symbolizes august tradition, and impressive power. Twenty thousand priests served him and to a lesser extent a whole nation. He was the embodiment of Judaism, something raised up by God and therefore sacrosanct. His duty it was to save the Jewish church from all its enemies, and before him he saw what he believed to be its greatest contemporary threat – Jesus of Nazareth called by some the Christ.

Here was a polarization indeed! The hierarchy must choose between its traditions and Jesus. He has accused them of being the heartless rulers of a desolate temple, the blind leaders of the blind, the fanatical zealots who had lost all sense of true priorities and had exchanged the kernel for the husk. Yes, he too says he has come to save the church. Now men who claim to believe in God must choose.

Order is heaven's first law, and organization is needed in religious matters. God had himself organized the first generation of Judaism at the time of its redemption from Egypt. But all institutions are prone to become idolatrous, self-perpetuating structures wherein means become ends. The spirit and essence can so easily evaporate, and a dead carcass remain. Unless the Spirit of God continues to be heard and obeyed, religious organization becomes a tool of hell rather than of heaven. And that Spirit is unpredictable, free in the fullest sense, and often apparently arbitrary to our carnal senses. Furthermore, he seems dangerously radical at times.

Twenty centuries testify to the rapid ossification of religious institutions. In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* we find the parable of the Grand Inquisitor who, on encountering one day the returned Christ, bade him depart lest he upset the people. Group after group has come to the place where it crucifies what it once worshiped. It is always done in respectable fashion but done none the less.

William Booth found that the church he had served so faithfully could not tolerate his kind of zeal. Thus the Salvation Army was born. Years later, the Baptist Union condemned Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist among them, because of his warnings against apostasy. His own people thus hastened his death. A century prior to that, William Carey and fellow pioneers at Serampore, found themselves confronted with a critical home committee of their own missionary society which had lost the original spirit and turned to worldly methods of procedure. Carey, therefore, separated from the institution he himself had formed. So it has been in all ages. Fallen human nature has the same propensities now as in the days of Caiaphas.

In every era the issue arises: shall Christ be crucified that the institution might live? Or shall the representatives of the institution fall on their knees exclaiming, "My Lord and my God. What wouldst thou have me to do?" The cross reminds us that allegiance to heaven is no easy thing. Crucifixion was not death but unto death, and so is the true Christian life. Unless we take up our cross daily, choosing his will even where it conflicts with our traditions and desires, we cannot be his disciples. But once we lift that cross it will lift us, becoming as wings to a bird and as sails to a ship. Death itself will be easy for those who have died a thousand times before. Choosing between Christ and Caiaphas in times of religious crisis is one such death.

The Thief

And he said unto Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And Jesus said unto him, "Verily, I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." (Lk 23:42-43)

Who would ever have invented this story! Like the rest of the Passion narrative which is so plain and unadorned, even reticent about central matters such as the actual crucifixion, this memory has the ring of truth.

Admire first the wonderful faith of this thief. Originally he too had mocked the Savior. But the mystery of the Sufferer's manner moved strongly upon his heart. He heard the prayer of intercession and marveled. He read the title on the cross, that little Bible suspended there. Suddenly, under the influence of the Spirit, he sees who it is that is besides him. He makes request in connection with a kingdom that was no earthly temporal one, for he is looking beyond the grave. And he calls the kingdom, Christ's own – "thy kingdom." He expects Christ to endure beyond death, and sees furthermore that Christ has the absolute right to allot places in that kingdom to whomsoever he wishes. Who else on earth revealed similar faith? None.

The man's faith is attended by works. He acknowledges the sinlessness of Jesus and his own guiltiness. He rebukes his companion. He manifests a wonderful humility, asking only that the Savior might remember him at the time of the kingdom.

The malefactor said, "This man hath done nothing amiss." It was a bold thing to say; the court had condemned him, the High Priest had reviled him, the sentiment of the times was against Him, the mob had hustled Him to Golgotha; and the malefactor undertook from that high court to reverse the decree, and to pronounce the Son of God unworthy of such a death!²

There is only one death-bed repentance in the Bible – one, so no one would despair; only one-so that none might presume. Usually it is not our dying that decides our fate, but our living. Observe also that it is possible to perish in the very presence of Christ.

Barabbas

Perhaps watching the scene with intense personal interest was the man who should have been on that central cross. How strange that the mob should have called for the guilty to go free and for the innocent to be executed! Yet that is the very enigma at the heart of the gospel.

Barabbas of all people in Jerusalem should best have understood the new teaching. He was worthy of death many times over. He had been captured and condemned and there was nothing he could do to accomplish his own release. Then, unexpectedly, almost unbelievably, had come the word, "You are free. Another has taken your place."

Did he, bewildered, as in a dream, make his way to the place of the skull outside the city and stand and watch the drama there? We do well to think upon Barabbas, because it is not by chance that his history is found in the Passion narrative. He represents all of us. We too are worthy of death, we too have been condemned by the law, we too are helpless to redeem ourselves. But Another has taken our place. Another has suffered in our stead. Blessed be God! When Par Lagerquist, Nobel prize winner, wrote his novel *Barabbas*, he had the delivered murderer ultimately become a Christian, willing and even eager to die for the One who had been his substitute. This was a true intuition upon the author's part. Gratitude, spontaneity, and a multitude of other motivations tell us that we can no longer live for ourselves, but for him who loved us and gave himself for us.

There are many layers of meaning in this vignette also. Pilate was forced to make a decision between the two men. So was the mob. And so are we. In every choice we either crucify Jesus and enthrone a murderer, or the reverse. There is no escaping the decision which will decide all else. Pilate's wife was asking an impossibility when she said, "Have nothing to do with this just man." We cannot ignore or avoid him. Either by our lives we cry, "Crucify him," or we crown him Lord of all.

Suppose Barabbas in his cell had met the news with incredulity. Suppose he had refused to accept his liberty, thinking it was a cruel joke. Or suppose he had told the messenger, "When I become a better member of society, then I will leave this prison. When I become a better man I will feel I can accept this pardon." Impossible! No, not impossible. Multitudes so react to the gospel invitation of grace every day. But Barabbas was not so stupid. God grant that we may not be.

The Title on the Cross

The title "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was written in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. It had meaning for all, whatever their national background. The Jews have prided themselves on righteousness, and the Greeks on wisdom, and the Romans power, but Christ is the righteousness of God, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. Thus the title was a little gospel for people of all nations to read.

In the providence of heaven all nations had met together for the passover feast. Men and women had come from all corners of the known world. As long ago darkness and earthquake had greeted the assembled multitudes about Sinai, so it was now. Men felt they stood before the tribunal of the great God.

That which was designed by men to vanquish all Christ's claims to kingship actually established them. From that cross he has reigned over the hearts of millions in all ages. The crucifixion sealed and ratified the eternal covenant and established on earth the heavenly kingdom. The king has come and from his Calvary throne banished the enemies of mankind—sin, death, the curse of the broken law, and those principalities and powers which war against the government of God (Col 2:14-15; 2 Ti 1:10; Heb 2:14-15). Satan bruised the heel of Christ, but the promised Seed crushed his head (Gn 3:15). Writhe he may, but revive he never shall. All that threatens us is now under the control of our sovereign Lord. On the stormy lake of Galilee the disciples feared death by drowning, but then they saw their Master coming to them walking on the billows they feared. Everything we fear is under his feet. Hallelujah!

The title had the place of priority on the cross – high above the crucified figure. When we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all else falls into its right place, being added to the primary blessing of membership in that kingdom which can never fail or perish.

The Conquering King

Krummacker suggests that the title, when read by faith, transforms the cross into a throne, and the crown of thorns into a diadem. When Jesus is recognized as king, we see the real meaning of the cross – royal triumph over Satan, sin, and death. What seemed defeat is actually victory.

Thou mayest recognize him by the victories he achieves, even on the fatal tree, the first of which is of a gloriously twofold character—over himself and over the infernal tempter. He is assailed by powerful temptations, which rise up in the shape of the scornful revilings of the people, who exclaim, "He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him," a powerful assault of the wicked one, almost more potent than when he urged him to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. How much did the taunting advice to come down correspond with the necessities of his suffering human nature!...

Yet, while hanging there, he is still a royal conqueror. Thou mightest think that no one was more overcome than he. But the prospective glass of faith will show you something different ... the eye of Jesus, instead of closing, scatters destroying lightnings; that his unfettered hands brandish a wondrous sword; that his feet tread freely on a stormy arena.... The hostile parties are the captain of the Lord's host and the infernal powers... his blood is the enemy's overthrow. He falls into the hands of his adversaries; but this is the means of rescuing us out of their hands. He suffers himself to be fettered by the bands of Belial; but his chains beget our liberty. He empties the cup of wrath; but only that he may fill it with blessings for us. He suffers himself to be wounded in the heel; at the same moment breaks the head of the old Serpent; and ... he conquers the enemy, like Samson, by his fall. Such are the achievements of the dying Jesus.³

What shall we say then in response to our Sovereign Lord? Shall we not confess that twenty centuries have not dimmed the title bestowed by a governor of old. "As decisively now as then He stands at every court, at every public and private tribunal, at the door of every man's heart, at every turn in our journey, before every thought of our mind, every choice of our will, every act of our life, and says, 'I am King.'"⁴

It is of great interest to learn that the earliest kind of crucifix was not that of a dying figure but rather of a living royal Christ dressed as high priest and crowned as king. Instead of the eyes being either agonized or closed, they are wide open as one regally surveying his dominion. Because he is indeed king of heaven and earth, death cannot destroy him. The resurrection is implied in his title.

Judas

Of this man alone it is written that it would have been better if he had not been born (Mt 26:24). How frightful the warning of his failure!

Judas was no libertine. He was devout and multigifted or he would not have been made the treasurer of the little band. But he could never accommodate himself to Christ's way of doing things. Pride and self-trust deceived him and he lost all. Refusing to yield to Incarnate Love he passed beyond help. The thirty pieces of silver gave no joy for they, like the manna of old, proved that whatever gifts of God are taken without his blessing turn to worms.

While not physically present at Calvary, the influence and shadow of Judas remained intensely real. He too had been hung on a tree-hung there by himself. Perhaps the procession to Calvary passed by the scene of his broken body after it had fallen from a projecting bough. Like all others in the drama, Judas is representative, signifying a large group associated with Christ and his gospel. Judas is called "the son of perdition" a title given also to Antichrist (Jn 17:12; 2 Th 2:3). He represents all with the spirit of Antichrist, those who profess Christ but in behavior deny him. This we see most clearly in Gethsemane when Judas kisses Christ as he betrays him.

The greatest danger confronting all who outwardly accept the gospel and follow Christ is the failure to be conformed to the principle of the cross. As Krummacher has written about our Lord:

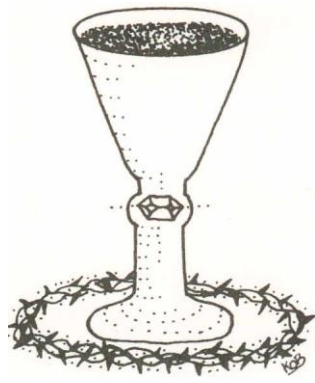
He requires the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts; unconditional submission to the divine commands, and unceasing endeavours after godliness. He protects property, sanctifies the marriage state, introduces order into families, condemns revolt, perjury, deceit, uncleanness, intemperance, and every offense against the moral government of the world, as the supporter and advocate of which he appears.⁵

From the beginning of his ministry, Christ had warned would-be followers that faith, if genuine, always issues in obedience (Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46; 14:33; Jn 15:14). Christ may forgive lawbreaking, but he never condones it. And his very forgiveness is a sanctifying balm which heals and makes whole. All who are justified by the blood of Christ become like him "obedient unto death."

The greatest harm done to the gospel comes, not from open blasphemers, but from those Christians who live in transgression of the precepts of righteousness. For this reason, it behooves us, in an age where some professors of Christ have turned liberty into license, to look closely at the relationship between the cross and the law. We will do this in another chapter.

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5. *Op. Cit.*, p. 71



CHAPTER 5

Snapshots Of The Calvary Drama (Part Three)

Sorrows and Signs

The Mockery

When we combine the testimony of all the Gospels, we discover that the Sufferer on the central cross was not only mocked by the passersby and the mob around the cross, but by the chief priests, the elders, the scribes, the Pharisees, the soldiers and the thieves. "He saved others, himself he cannot save." Such was a major sneer in the mocking of the bystanders. "Let Christ, the king of Israel come down from the cross, that we may see and believe." Being the children of the devil, they imitate the words of him who had earlier tempted Christ by saying, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." "If thou art the king of the Jews, save thyself" echoed the suffering thieves before one of them surrendered to Incarnate Love beside him.

Here, as always, the devil overreached himself. The words meant to shame Christ actually glorify him. He was not on the cross because he *could* not come down, but because he *would* not. The bonds of love, not the nails of men, kept him there. It was strictly true that if he was indeed to save others then he could not, must not, save himself. "Thou that destroyest the temple, and in three days buildest it, save thyself." This also was prophetic in a way undreamed of. He would in love permit the tabernacle of his body to be taken down, but within three days it would be rebuilt. Thus we find in the mockery, statements both radically false and in another sense sublimely true.

There is another practical lesson to be learned from this aspect of the Savior's sufferings. Once he had warned the Jews that what was esteemed by God was an abomination with men and vice versa (Lk 16:15). Calvary was a perfect example of this truth. In spiritual matters the majority are rarely right. Worldly vision must "see and believe" and in that order. The things of the unseen world are unknown and unvalued. Only the Christian "believes and sees." "*Believest thou?*" said Christ to Nathanael. "Thou shalt *see* greater things than these" (Jn 1:50).

The Crown of Thorns

In Christ's mock crown which may still have adorned him on the cross (there is no word of its removal) we have a minicross. It is a cross within a cross. The lesson about life is thus twice told, and the message of grace as well.

The lesson? That *none can escape pain, but through faith in Christ it can become a diadem of glory*. We have no choice as regards the fact of suffering though we have sometimes a choice as to its nature. Everyone has his own cross, even the wicked have their manifold woes. There is a stone in every shoe, and a weak spot in every earthly staff we lean on. We speak of believers also, for they ever need the discipline of trial to keep them close to the Redeemer. We find thorns in the choicest gardens of our lives, we find them in our families, in our children, even in our most pleasant circumstances. There is no Eden without a serpent, no sheltering gourd without an attacking worm.

How can our pains and annoyances be woven into a crown of glory? Only by trust in the love and providence of God. Again it is a matter not of what happens to us, but what we do with what happens to us. Do we interpret our sorrows through the carnal sight of selfishness, or through the kaleidoscope of faith?

Nearly five centuries ago, just prior to the Reformation, one who knew the secret scribbled it out and enclosed it with a basket of fruit for a friend. Here it is—the philosophy of the cross and the crown of thorns:

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see; and to see, we have only to look. I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver; but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard. Remove the covering, and you will find beneath it a living splendour, woven of love, by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty: believe me, that angel's hand is there; the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing Presence.

Life is so full of meaning and of purpose, so full of beauty—beneath its covering—that you will find that earth but cloaks your heaven. Courage then to claim it; that is all! But courage you have; and the knowledge that we are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home.

And so I greet you; with the prayer that for you, now and for ever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.¹

Yes, the minicross of the thorn crown teaches the same lesson as the crucifixion itself and the title above the Son of God. Says Alexander Maclaren:

Every N.T. reference to Christ's dominion is accompanied with a reference to His cross, and every reference to His cross merges in a reference to His throne. The crown of thorns was a revelation of the cold circlet within a golden covering blazing with jewels. Christ's right to sway men, like His power to do so, rests on his sacrifice for men. A Christianity without a cross is a Christianity without authority.... A Christ without a cross is a Christ without a kingdom. The dominion of the world belongs to Him who can sway men's inmost motives. Hearts are His who has bought them with His own.²

This Golgotha crown teaches us many profound truths. It is meant to cure us of our desires for the vain glory and pomp of this world. It should take the glitter from our gold and the lustre from our gems. As no imperial purple can match the glory of the blood of Christ, so no jewels can equal his thorns. Strange that man's original clothing after the Fall was intended as a symbol of his shame, but it has now been transformed by proud humanity into an instrument of pride.

Following in Christ's steps, we remember that we can never be truly kings until on the brow of patience we have worn some crown of thorns.

The Wine and Myrrh

Christ is offered vinegar mixed with gall – a bitter ingredient (myrrh) which would have acted as an anodyne to his sufferings. Our Lord condescends to taste but not to drink. He uses not his superhuman power to divine the nature of the potion, but, like us, is forced to learn through experimentation. Then he refuses the drug which would defile his mind and body and sully his spotless sacrifice.

He is resolved to drain the cup of his atoning sufferings to the dregs and, therefore, refuses anything that would mitigate his pain. Later, after crying, "I thirst," he accepted the nonintoxicating ration wine of the soldiers extended to him in a soaked sponge on a hyssop reed. Thereby Christ set us the example of "using" but not "abusing" the things of this world. He shuns both intemperance and asceticism, and does all things well. What a difference between him and the millions of his professed followers who greedily swallow unnecessary drugs as the "quick fix" for every problem.

Fill high the bowl, and spice it well, and pour
The dew oblivious: for the Cross is sharp,
The Cross is sharp, and He
Is tenderer than a lamb.
Thou wilt feel all, that thou may'st pity all;
And rather would'st Thou wrestle with strong pain
Than overcloud Thy soul,
So clear in agony,
Or lose one glimpse of heaven before the time.
O most entire and perfect sacrifice,
Renewed in every pulse.

-Keble

The Tunic

Lo, Thou that clothest man with raiment, beasts with hides, fishes with scales and shells, earth with flowers, heaven with stars, art despoiled of clothing, and standest exposed to the scorn of all beholders. As the first Adam entered into his paradise, so dost Thou, the second Adam, into Thine – naked; and as the first Adam was clothed with innocence when he had no clothes, so wert Thou, the second, too; and more than so; Thy nakedness, O Saviour, clothes our souls, not with innocence only, but with beauty. Hadst not Thou been naked, we had been clothed with confusion. O happy nakedness, whereby we are invested with glory! All the beholders stand wrapped with warm garments; Thou only art stripped to tread the wine-press alone. How did Thy blessed mother now wish her veil upon Thy shoulders! and that disciple, who lately ran from Thee naked, wished in vain that his loving pity might do that for Thee, which fear forced him to do for himself.³

As prophecy had foretold, his garments are divided among his crucifiers (Ps 22:18). But the tunic without seam, woven from the top to the bottom, must go as a whole item. It is too valuable to tear.

From the beginning of Scripture, clothing is used as a symbol of character. Our first parents in Eden were clothed in light. When this was lost by their sin, they tried to remedy their nakedness by the manufacture of fig-leaf coverings. These the Lord removed at the time of their penitence and gave instead the skins of a sacrifice to clothe them. In the last book of Scripture we find the same symbolism. The church is pictured as a glorious bride radiant with the "fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" a gift from the Savior bridegroom.

We recall how less than twenty-four hours earlier, Christ rose from the Passover supper and, divesting himself of his outer garment, attired himself with a towel – the symbol of service. After washing the feet of his recalcitrant followers, he declared them to be clean and then sat down again. The whole scene was an acted-out parable of the plan of redemption whereby God the Son, long ago rose from the throne of the heavenly universe and left the feast of adoration he enjoyed there, to descend to darkened earth. To do this he had to strip himself of his glory – this Being brighter than a million suns who had stars for the fringe of his robe – and take on the towel of humanity in order to wash us white by sacrificial service. And from eternity it had been planned that after making his atonement he would resume his glory and sit once more on his throne among the immortals. Now at Calvary we have the same drama in microcosm. He permits Himself to be stripped in order that he might clothe us in his own righteousness – we who crucified him. As the high priest on the Day of Atonement, at the close of his work, left behind the common garments in which he had worked and resumed his glorious attire, so Christ left in the tomb his linen clothes and was resurrected in glory to glory.

We might well sing with the gospel prophet:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my soul shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
(Isa 61:10)

As the wonderful father bestowed upon his prodigal son the best robe, so does our Heavenly Father for all who believe.

The Darkness

The supernatural darkness from twelve noon till three in the afternoon served many purposes. It veiled the sufferings of the eternal Son from sinful mortals. It mirrored the heart of him who hung on the cross, and it interrupted the caravan of life causing men to question why nature itself should thus mourn. Some saw the connection between the sun and the Son and became believers. Others chose to ignore the token and ever afterwards dwelled in darkness of the soul. This was to prove true of the Jewish nation as a whole, though not of individual Jews who repented.

As Christ hung in darkness for three hours on the Friday, so for three days thereafter he would be in the darkness of the tomb. In both cases light would ultimately vanquish the gloom. All is dark where Jesus does not shine. But as he cried aloud, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" his words banished the darkness. And so they do still.

What a graphic parabolic act on the Creator's part, causing the sun to veil its face that it might not behold the blackest crime ever committed in the universe. And that sun was a symbol of him who loves righteousness but cannot look upon iniquity. The mid-day/midnight was nature's sermon to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Some may have thought of the "horror of great darkness" which fell upon the first Jew at the time when righteousness was reckoned to him on the basis of faith not sight (Gn 15:6). Others thought of the pall over guilty Egypt about the time her firstborn were slain. Still others recollected that in the beginning when God was about to bring cosmos out of chaos, a great darkness encompassed the world.

And what does it mean for me, today, apart from its testimony to the atoning work of deity? It reminds me that there is a dark shadow attached to even the best of things. *There is no life without crosses, no crown without thorns, and no substance of any kind without a shadow.* This darkness mirrors the opposition from below which will threaten each and every soul in the discharge of duty. But shadows are like nightmares – they do not last. The night surrenders to the day, and even during its darkest hours we are to remember "the treasures of darkness," for "the night also is thine." It is written that once Moses "drew near to the thick darkness *where God was*" (Ex 20:21). When it seems that we are being swallowed up by an intense stygian cloud, let us remember that the Light of the World was thus eclipsed but rose again on the third day. Whatever the pain, the loss, this day – resurrection and vindication are certain and will not forever tarry.

The Earthquake

"And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit... and the earth shook, and the rocks were split" (Mt 27:50-51).

The earth shook and trembled in sympathy with its Author as he cut the cable linking him to life. As his soul trembled and his great heart broke, the mountains and plains shivered and the rocks split apart. "... the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Mt 27:51-53).

As the temple had torn its garment (veil) in mourning, so with earth itself. It sorrows with its Lord, but that sorrow is turned into joy for many as the dead rise. His death brought immediate life – symbolic of its continuing impact upon all spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and physically dead as the penalty of sin. Thus also was prefigured the great resurrection of all saints who at Christ's second coming will leave the graves to enter (like this group at the time of the first advent) the holy city. These resurrected ones are indeed the firstfruits of the great harvest of the dead, teaching us that the end of the world came legally with Christ. The rent rocks also symbolically tell of the results of the cross. Hearts as hard as stone will be rent by the story of God's love in Christ.

The Rent Veil

As our Lord gave his last cry, a cry of trust and victory, and voluntarily bowed his head in death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mt 27:51). The meaning was made clear by the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22)

Once a year the Jewish high priest entered the most holy place "within the veil." All year long he had ministered in the first apartment, the symbol of the Jewish age which made nothing perfect and functioned in the realm of types and shadows only. But on the one Day of Atonement, he – the only man on earth permitted so to do – entered into the very presence of God through the veil – but not without blood, and not without incense, and only for a few moments. Thus was prefigured Christ's atonement on Calvary which brought to an end the system of types prefigured by the sanctuary's first apartment, and opened up the era of the new covenant with its privileges of access and imputed perfection-symbolized by the most holy place (see Heb 6:19, 20; 9:8, 12, 24-25; 10:1-12).

As the riven side showed that the way to the heart of God was open, so the riven veil taught the same lesson. Christ's death has procured forgiveness and access to God and heaven for every man. His atonement is perfect and complete – his reconciliation of God and man has been accomplished. Constantly the New Testament uses the aorist tense in speaking of Christ's work of reconciliation (see 2 Cor 5:14-25 and Rom 5:10). "It is finished" indeed. Now, whosoever will may come. Christ has taken away the sin of the world, its past sin, present sin, and future sin. The only barrier to acceptance with heaven is the willful barrier of unbelief. At no time can the law condemn the believer, anymore than it can condemn Christ. God can now "justify the ungodly" who while sinners and without strength *were* reconciled to God by the death of his Son. As the passover lamb was slain while the Israelites were still in Egypt, so while we were yet sinners, our atonement was accomplished. All done by the first Adam has been legally undone by the second Adam. What glorious news to take to the world – men need not try to reconcile God, he is already reconciled. We need only to believe, to receive. And God in his infinite mercy actually pleads with us to accept the so great salvation. Says Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21:

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The Resurrection

Only Christianity offers firm grounds for hope in the face of death. Without the fact of Christ's victory over death, our own death would be swathed in gloom, and therefore our life as well. We look to the end of a thing to find its meaning. If our end is dust forever, then life has been a farce. But none can find the skeleton of Christ. His worst enemies could not find it nineteen centuries ago. In the very place where he was executed as a malefactor, his resurrection was proclaimed and believed in. And it is that resurrection which makes our own certain.

The existence of the Christian church testifies to the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing else could have transformed those broken men and women and filled them with radiant power – a power that did not diminish before the threat of martyrdom. Read the resurrection accounts in the four Gospels. They differ in details for there has been no attempt to forge a lie. They all have the ring of truth. Hundreds who had seen the risen Christ were still alive when the first letter to the Corinthians was written (1 Cor 15:6).

Paul declared that Christ's resurrection was a fulfillment of the ancient Scriptures (see 1 Cor 15:4). On the first, third day of history the earth had risen from the waters. On the third day of his death-sentence, Isaac was delivered as in resurrection. For long centuries Israel reaped on the third day after the Passover the first fruits of the harvest, pledge of the great ingathering to follow. Jonah had been resurrected from the watery abyss on the third day. After Aaron's rod had lain in the darkness, Moses found that it had budded – life from the dead. When Israel crossed Jordan they took from thence twelve stones and placed them as memorials in the new land – emblems of the resurrection of their nation from the death of slavery.

Prophets also had foretold the resurrection of the Messiah. While Isaiah sadly portrayed the "cutting off" of the Servant of the Lord, he also wrote that he would "see his seed" (Is 53:8, 10).

Psalms 22 divides into two sections, verses 1-21 filled with sorrow and death, but then verses 22-31 which speak of one who lives to give his testimony before his brethren and before whom all the dead shall one day bow (see also Ps 16). Because the Messiah would conquer death, the Old Testament foretells the resurrection of good and evil alike (Dan 12:2).

In John 19:41 we read, "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid."

Alexander Maclaren speaking of John's characteristic style says:

... it is quite in John's manner to attach importance to these apparent trifles and to give no express statement that he is doing so. There are several other instances in the Gospel where similar details are given which appear to have had in his eyes a symbolical meaning – e.g. "And it was night." There may have been such a thought in his mind, for all men in high excitement love and seize symbols, and I can scarcely doubt that the reason which induced Joseph to make his grave in a garden was the reason which induced John to mention so particularly its situation, and they both discerned in that garden round the sepulchre the expression of what was to the one a dim desire, to the other "a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" – that they who are laid to rest in the grave shall come forth again in new and fairer life, as 'the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to bud.'⁴

A garden is the symbol of life and death, of life after death. It is the place of seeds which in winter seem dead but which burst forth in spring to gladden the earth. Adam had sinned in a garden thus bringing death and turning that garden into a wilderness. The second Adam came to that wilderness, lived and died obediently, and turned the wilderness into a garden.

For us in this life, there is no garden without a sepulcher. The shadow of death attends all things beautiful. In the days when tuberculosis was much more widespread than our own, the signs of abnormal beauty and brilliance were often the indications of coming death. The universal phenomenon is the sign of universal sin. "Death passed upon all men for all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). Even nature by its rhythm testifies. Day is followed by night and summer by autumn and winter. Weariness, weakness presage the oncoming end-death, and every sickness is a minideath.

But the good news of the Gospels is that Christ has sanctified the grave and plucked the sting from death. The grim reaper has himself been reaped by the Lord of the harvest. For "now is Christ risen from the dead" (1 Cor 15:20). His resurrection is the seal on his finished work. It testifies that all men have been legally justified, for Christ "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). That is, his death was the result of our trespasses, and his resurrection was the result of the justification of the human race which he had achieved. Thus Scripture affirms that Christ "has abolished death" and turned it into a mere sleep (2 Ti 1:10; 1 Th 4:16, 17). Now we know that God does not despise mankind and leave it in the grave. Did he do so, would not we despise others and not reckon their death a matter of significance? If, in the providence of God, we ultimately become refuse, what is there to stop us treating each other as refuse now?

But to us has been given the assurance that to die is no more a venturing along a lonely path. Christ has traveled it before us and trodden down every thorn. The sepulcher of every believer is illuminated by his presence.

Let none tell you religion is irrelevant. It is the most relevant thing in the world, if it is the genuine article and not that parasitic growth which attaches itself fungus-like to all things living. Plato was right when he wrote that 'men are in danger of forgetting that they who rightly practice philosophy study nothing else than dying and death.' Death is the iron ring round existence, and our earthly pilgrimage has been described as but a torso – "a watch or a vision between a sleep and a sleep."

Nearly 1400 years ago, Edwin, King of Northumbria, was visited by a Christian monk endeavoring to persuade him to accept Christ. One of the warriors addressed the king in words recorded by the venerable Bede.

"The present life of man upon earth, O King, seems to me, in comparison to the time which is unknown to us, like the swift flight of a sparrow through that house wherein you sit at supper in winter with your ealdormen and thegns, while the fire blazes in the midst, and the hall is warmed, but the wintry storms of rain or snow are raging abroad without. The sparrow, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry tempest; but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight, passing from winter into winter again. So this life of man appears for a little while, but of what is to follow or what went before we know nothing at all. If therefore this doctrine tells us something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed."

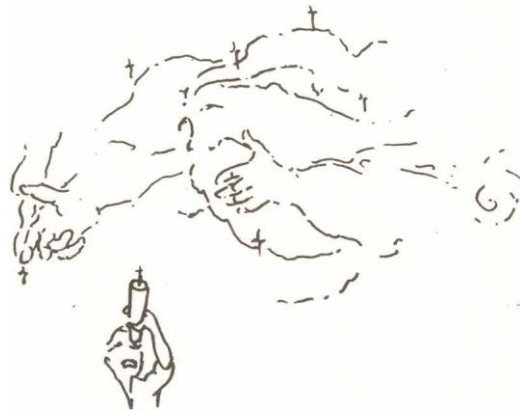
And Edwin built the first York Cathedral pointing to the heavens as man's destiny.⁵

Christ is risen! We need despair of nothing – pain, tragedy, guilt, death. He changes all. He uses all. Nothing is impossible to him who lives this very day making intercession for us. We are not alone and we are loved. Death has been interrupted in its scything – One has come who has destroyed death and who enables believers to reign over it. We enter "a new creation" crowned with life everlasting as we see the significance of the death of the Son of God. Reconciliation, peace, and life replace alienation, enmity, and death. Rejoice evermore!

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CHAPTER 6

Patterns of Seven and Glimpses of Heaven (Part One)

The First Four Sayings From the Cross

Seven: Perfection, Completion, and Rest

Genesis introduces us to the number seven in the story of creation, while Revelation uses the same number over fifty times. The number seven is symbolic of perfection, completion and rest. It is not strange, therefore, that in the Passion narrative of redemption (re-creation), the *legal* end of the world, seven is again prominent.

Our Lord passed through seven trials: before Annas, Caiaphas, a night meeting with the Sanhedrin, the morning meeting with the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, then finally back to Pilate again. The accusations against him number seven, namely: 1) that he threatened to destroy the temple, 2) that he was a malefactor, 3) that he perverted the nation, 4) that he forbade the paying of tribute, 5) that he stirred up the people, 6) that he claimed to be a king, 7) that he claimed also to be the Son of God. In contrast to the sevenfold accusation we find seven testimonies to the innocence of Christ. These come from Judas (Mt 27:4); Pilate (Jn 18:38; 19:4); Herod (Lk 23:15); Pilate's wife (Mt 27:19); the dying thief (Lk 23:41); the Roman centurion (Lk 23:47); those with the Roman centurion (Mt 27:54).

John records seven questions from Pilate to Jesus, but our Lord does not always answer, and his last word to the Procurator is "sin." (Jn 18:33, 35, 37-38; 19:9-11).

The number seven is prominent even in regard to the time element involved in the Passion. The cross itself is a miniweek of hours. As in the beginning, Christ as Creator worked six days and entered into rest on the seventh, so at Calvary he suffered six hours and on the seventh entered into rest. After six hours, Christ uttered his sixth cry, "It is finished," using the key word of Genesis 2 in connection with creation's close. With the seventh cry we read that he bowed his head. The Greek term ("klinas") is one used for a man bowing his head on a pillow for rest in sleep. Similarly, Passion Week climaxed on the sixth day while the seventh and last was spent in Sabbath rest – the only whole day spent in the tomb.

The Seven Sayings from the Cross

We will now consider the Redeemer's seven pronouncements from the cross. They constitute his final sermon, a blazing altar light illuminating the darkness of our lives. What a unique pulpit, preacher and message! We put our God to sleep on a cross, tucking in his hands and feet with nails and giving him a pillow of thorns. Yet in his love and mercy he speaks to us, not words of fiery rebuke and indignation, but words of light and grace. Any deathbed is a solemn sight, but especially if it is the deathbed of someone we love. This is even more the case if we ourselves have been responsible for that suffering and death.

The seven sayings constitute a little Bible. They tell us how to live and how to die. The sayings are intimate and personal, like shafts of light into life's pits of darkness. They also express the seven chief duties of the believer, and the seven main articles in a Christian's creed. Furthermore, they unveil Christ's glory – his offices, his perfections, and his truth. The relationship between them is that of parts of living machinery, interlocking to God's glory and our edification. The seven constitute a circle ending where they began, with the call of a trusting child to his father. It was this golden circle of confidence which enabled Christ so serenely to plead for his murderers and pledge Paradise to the penitent thief, and make provision for his mother. In principle, the seven sayings give us a cross section of all of life's situations, and help us to relate to them aright.

The seven sayings were addressed to an audience in heaven and on earth. They were addressed in particular to friends and foes gathered about the cross. As usual, with the sevens of Scripture, these are divided into sets of three and four, with the first set entirely dedicated to the needs of others. Following these came the mysterious darkness during which Christ spoke not at all until the three hours had passed. Then his fourth saying dissipated the blackness and ushered back the sunshine. In quick succession came the last three exclamations of the dying Sufferer.

Here are the sayings in their order:

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

"Truly, I say to you today, you shall be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43).

"Woman, behold your son [Son,] behold your mother" (Jn 19:26-27).

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46).

"I thirst" (Jn 19:28).

"It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

"Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

Let us now consider the seven sayings one by one, remembering as we do so, the words of Krummacher when he asserted that Christ's enemies by the crucifixion broke "a diamond in pieces," thus only causing it to show its genuineness by its sparkling splinters. "In their wrath, they plucked to pieces a divine rose, but by so doing, only displayed the brilliance and enamel of every petal."¹

The Word of Intercession for His Crucifiers

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk 23:34)

The very first word, "Father," is full of significance. We have observed already that while these messages from the cross address Jesus' crucifiers and immediate companions (the thief, his mother and beloved disciple), they are bracketed at each end by his calling upon God

as his Father. Only because he knew God was his Father could Christ endure the crucifixion.

There is a lesson in this for us. We can accept the vilest medicine from the hand we trust. True sanity can best be preserved in a world of insanity by confidence that life has meaning, and that its meaning is good. Love is impossible without faith and hope, and life without love is mere animal existence. The death of hope ever leads to the hope for death, and with ebbing hope dies faith, love and all things good. When Christ in his seventh word committed his life to his Father, he did so in the fullness of hope that the best was yet to be. Hope provides a "why" which enables us to put up with any "what."

This pleading by Christ fulfilled Isaiah 53: 12 where the prophet had foretold intercession for the transgressors by One numbered with them who was also God's arm and servant. We remember that Christ's ministry had begun with prayer at his baptism when he knelt on Jordan's bank seeking strength for his task. Now that ministry is sealed by prayer.

Often in the Gospels Christ himself forgave those who sought him. But on the cross, inasmuch as he is being treated as sin itself, he asks his Father in heaven to grant forgiveness. Our Lord is both priest and offering on the altar of Calvary.

In this petition we find the clue to our primary need. Noble ideals and lofty resolutions are powerless unless the sin question is settled. Forgiveness is the door into the "Temple Beautiful" of the Christian life. As glasses are of no value if we are blind, or shoes if we are paralyzed, so only when sin's guilt is removed is the power of sin also broken (Rom 6:14). *Sin ceases to have dominion over us when our hearts are broken by the forgiving grace of God.* Heaven's mercy is a healing mercy, and justification (being declared righteous) is always accompanied by the beginning of sanctification (righteous living).

Let it be clearly observed that ignorance does not mean innocence. Even those who knew not what they did needed forgiveness. Sin is sin whether recognized or not. It is beneficial to us all to become intelligent as to the will of God. This is part of the first great commandment regarding loving our Heavenly Father with all our mind as well as our heart and strength.

Every relationship of life calls for the spirit of forgiveness. There are no perfect spouses or children, employers or employees, or neighbors. Only those aware that God has forgiven them much can love much, and cover the transgressions of others (Lk 7:36-50). No one can ever be free from situations where they feel crucified by misunderstanding, unfairness or wickedness. At that point, either the attitude of the crucifiers changes our attitude or vice versa.

As we behold that Christ did not harbor even the smallest root of bitterness or resentment or condemnation, we are ourselves challenged to avoid harsh judgment of others. How natural and easy it is for each of us to attribute evil purpose to those offending us! Says Baring Gould:

Surely one thing we may learn at once from this first word of Christ on the Cross-the avoidance of harsh judgment. How ready we are to attribute evil purpose people. How ready to take umbrage at little undesigned offences, and to assume that they were intentional slights. What a reproach we receive from Christ on the Cross! He hears the outrageous words of His enemies, he sees their insolent gestures, He feels their piercing cruelty in hands and feet and head, and yet – he finds an excuse, He palliates their offence. Beside this marvellous love, how mean and un-Christian is our touchiness, captiousness, and uncharitableness.

We may learn one thing more-that many an evil act may be done from a misguided mind, and from a perverted conscience, and will meet with a lenient sentence from God. Not all the wrong done in the world or in the Church, done by those who are servants of the State or ministers of Christ, will meet with the condemnation we are ready to accord it, for the motive was not always, probably not often, evil but good. "They will put you out of the synagogues;" said Our Blessed Lord to His disciples, "yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (S. John xvi. 2) He spoke this, not only to forewarn His chosen of coming tribulations, but also to prepare them how to regard their persecutors, as men to be excused and forgiven, because acting not from wicked but from good motives misdirected.²

Marvel also at the charitable hope of Christ. He does not quickly despair of men. Neither should we. If there was hope for the crucifiers of our Lord, is there not hope for the worst persons we encounter? We are to pray on, love on.

Neither should this be difficult for us who constantly grieve the heart of the Savior, and who as constantly receive forgiveness from him. What we live by, we should and must impart, and even the most righteous Christian lives by forgiveness, for it is written "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Ps 32:1-2; Rom 4:8). Because the believer has legally died with Christ, all his sins are atoned for, be they past, present, or future. The Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world – all the sin of all people in all times. We are "complete in him," "accepted in the Beloved," and "there is no condemnation." On the other hand, "If thou shouldst mark iniquity, who would stand?" (Ps 130:3). Sing and dance for joy. What blessing is there like the blessing of forgiveness? Therefore, pass it on.

The Word of Salvation to the Penitent Thief

"Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43).

The original manuscripts of the Bible had no punctuation marks and we have placed the comma of the sentence where we believe it belongs. The thief did not die that day. Because the bodies had to be taken down, his legs were broken to prevent revival and escape.

Originally this thief had railed on Christ, but when he beheld the divine Sufferer's bearing and attitude, he suddenly had a revulsion of feeling. He reads the little Bible, the inscription above Christ's head, and memory puts together things he has heard in recent months. As the Savior prayed for his enemies, the thief longed to share the benefits of that intercession. Hence his own request.

It is at this moment we perceive in the cross both a throne and a judgment bar. Christ as king and judge pronounces destiny and makes awards. How glorious the providence of God that the man who now is promised heaven seems so entirely unsuited for it! How encouraging to us that one who had sinned to his last hours should be plucked by heaven from the gaping jaws of hell! He is a perfect illustration of salvation by grace alone. For a long time the thief had been exposed to law, but law did not reform him. Now, when he sees the true law as love incarnate, his heart is broken, his rebellion melted.

To run and work the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands;
But better news the gospel brings,

It bids us fly and gives us wings!

The conjunction of this saying with Christ's word of forgiveness is striking and significant. God's forgiveness is not indiscriminate. It is for the penitent. The same sunshine that brings forth fruit from black earth shines in vain upon hard rock. The other thief curses on and is lost. It is quite possible to be lost though in close proximity to Christ, if we do not permit his love to melt our hate and selfishness. Christ, who seemed so easy on the souls who knew their need, was also hard on the self-righteous. Salvation is *easy* for those who acknowledge their guilt, but *impossible* for those who think they need no repentance.

The thief is saved without works (although he uses in Christ's service the only member of his body free to work, his tongue), but he is not saved without faith. His was the greatest faith in Israel that day. He saw in the condemned, dying, forsaken Jesus the King of Paradise. What a wonderful thief is this, stealing heaven itself by happy permission of the owner of Paradise. Observe also that from his high court this thief reverses the judgment of Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, the Sanhedrin and the mob. He calls Christ Lord, Master of heaven and earth.

Bishop Ryle sums up the practical meaning of this event:

The first notable step in the thief's repentance was his concern about his companion's wickedness in reviling Christ: "Dost thou not fear God," he said, "seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" – The second step was a full acknowledgement of his own sin: "We indeed are justly in condemnation. We receive the due reward of our deeds" – The third step was an open confession of Christ's innocence: "This man hath done nothing amiss." – The fourth step was faith in Jesus Christ's power and will to save him: he turned to a crucified sufferer, and called Him "Lord," and declared his belief that He had a kingdom. – The fifth step was prayer: he cried to Jesus when He was hanging on the cross, and asked Him even then to think upon his soul. – The sixth and last step was humility: he begged to be "remembered" by our Lord. He mentions no great thing: enough for him if he is remembered by Christ. These six points should always be remembered in connection with the penitent thief. His time was very short for giving proof of his conversion; but it was time well-used. Few dying people have ever left behind them such good evidences as were left by this man.³

The Word of Affection to His Mother

"Woman, behold your son.... [Son,] behold your mother." (Jn 19:26-27).

Much of our suffering is greatly exaggerated by our extreme self-concern and self-pity. Somehow it is embedded in our minds that we have a right to happiness and that all pain is an intrusion. What a rebuke to us, this third word from the cross. Despite the agony of mind and body, our Lord forgets his pain and shows concern for others.

Observe that even the suffering God himself is subject to the eternal principles he gave from Sinai to his ancient redeemed people. Now he honors the fifth commandment by respect for his mother. He provides for her the best possible endowment, the love of his dearest friend.

Many commentators have seen in Mary a symbol of the church, which is "the mother of us all." Consequently, they have found depths in Christ's twofold statement here that are not immediately apparent. John and Mary were not related by birth, but now as people reborn they become members of the same family. Thus it is with the church as a whole. Those reborn in Christ are related to all others similarly regenerated. They belong to the one family. From this saying we learn that believers are to exercise love and respect towards the church which is their mother, and the church is to collectively demonstrate love and care for each of her sons and daughters. The saying is particularly an admonition to the leaders of the church (pastors, teachers and administrators) to have a special care for the weak and needy of the fold, and for the straying.

However, the obvious intent of the saying must not be lessened by other legitimate deductions. Christ sees the family as a sacred unit. With the Sabbath, it is one of the heirlooms of Eden, that ancient paradise. Were homes hallowed by true religion today, we would dwell in a little paradise en route to the great one. All family relationships are sacrosanct – husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter. They mirror relationships in God's great family of heaven and earth. Whoever despises marriage or the family endangers all mankind and especially the church of Christ. The Calvary narrative repeatedly draws upon the initial scenes of Scripture. Both in the first chapters of Genesis and in the story of the cross we have references to a garden, a tree of life and a tree of knowledge of good and evil, a naked Adam who falls asleep and has his side opened in order that he might have a bride, family relationships, the finishing of work and entering into rest, the Sabbath, temptation and the curse, two thieves, the issue of the right to Paradise. Each account casts light upon the other.

The Word of Anguish to God

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46).

C. S. Lewis once summed up the "losses" of Christ:

Does not every movement in the Passion write large some common element in the sufferings of our race? First, the prayer of anguish; not granted. Then He turns to His friends. They are asleep – as ours, or we, are so often, or busy, or away, or preoccupied. Then He faces the Church; the very Church that He brought into existence. It condemns Him. This is also characteristic. In every Church, in every institution there is something which sooner or later works against the very purpose for which it came into existence. But there seems to be another chance. There is the State; in this case, the Roman state. Its pretensions are far lower than those of the Jewish church, but for that very reason it may be free from local fanaticisms. It claims to be just, on a rough, worldly level. There is still an appeal to the People – the poor and simple whom he had blessed. But they have become over-night (it is nothing unusual) a murderous rabble shouting for His blood. There is, then, nothing left but God. And to God, God's last words are, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

You see how characteristic, how representative it all is. The human situation writ large. These are among the things it means to be a man. Every rope breaks when you seize it. Every door is slammed shut as you reach it.⁴

To understand the mysterious cry of dereliction, we must include the strange bewilderment of Christ in Gethsemane. It is all related to these words from the cross. Where Mark uses the words "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mk 4:33), the Greek term translated "troubled" ("*ademonein*") describes a confused, distracted state which sometimes results from physical derangement. According to Swete it means "the distress which follows a great shock." Christ was no coward, but here he is in agony as he faces death.

One fact and one fact only can explain the two events of the shocked, distressed spirit and bleeding brow in the garden, and the anguished cry from Golgotha. That fact is that Jesus was "made sin for us," even "a curse" (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). God hid his face from Christ who represented the sin of all the ages. When Christ foretold his fate, he likened it to the time when Moses lifted up the molten serpent on a banner staff (Jn 3:14). He was telling Nicodemus that he was to be treated as the devil, as sin incarnate.

Is not the worst part of sin's punishment the awareness of being separated from God? Could Christ truly have taken our place without experiencing such separation from his Father? Peter Green suggests that would "have been as if He had paid the farthings, pence, and shillings of some vast debt but left the pounds for us to pay."⁵

Spurgeon says that the records of time and eternity do not contain a sentence more full of anguish than this fourth word from the cross. Christ had endured silently all the torment of his body, but when his Father forsook him, his great heart broke. It is not, "Why has Peter forsaken Me? Why has Judas betrayed me?" These were terrible griefs but this is the sharpest and cut him to the quick. "The sufferings of his soul were the soul of his sufferings."

There are times when some of us face a horror which makes the brain reel and the heart faint, "the horror of a universe without God, a universe which is one hideous, tumbling crashing mass of confusion with no reason to guide and no love to sustain it." At such times a glance at Calvary can steady us and perhaps even restore us. He was forsaken that we might never be. He prayed that prayer, that we might never need to. We need not suffer for our sin, for Christ has suffered in our place. Therefore, however overwhelming our grief and bewilderment, let us like Christ hold on crying, "My God, My God...." Hold on to the arm which only appears to be thrusting us away. Recall the Syro-phenician woman to whom Christ momentarily pretended to be unsympathetic (Mk 7:24-30). Let her faith be yours also. Hold on. Nightmares never last. Tunnels have their exits. Only those who live through the dark see the glories of the dawn.

This moment on Calvary reveals the very heart of the Atonement. Our Redeemer in his divine nature suffers infinitely. Spurgeon rightly concludes:

Behold how marvellously in the person of Christ the Lord has vindicated His law.... if to make His law glorious He had said "These multitudes of men have broken my law, and therefore they shall perish, the law would have been terribly magnified. But instead he says "Here is my only Son, My other self; He has taken on Himself the nature of these rebellious creatures and consents that I should lay on Him the load of their iniquity and visit in His person the offences.... worlds innumerable throughout the boundless creation of God see in the death of God's dear Son a declaration of his determination never to allow sin to be trifled with. Infinite love does not eclipse justice any more than His justice is permitted to destroy His love."⁶

Should we not hate the sin that brought such agony to him who loved us so? Shall we sin lightly because there is forgiveness with God? That would be like cutting ourselves with a knife because we have a Band-Aid. How can one so much loved stab the heart of the One loving? The cross is a revelation of how much our sin hurts God, and only the insensible are not anaesthetized against rebellion by the sight.

The dearest idol I have known
Whate'er that idol be,
Lord, I will tear it from its throne,
And worship only Thee.

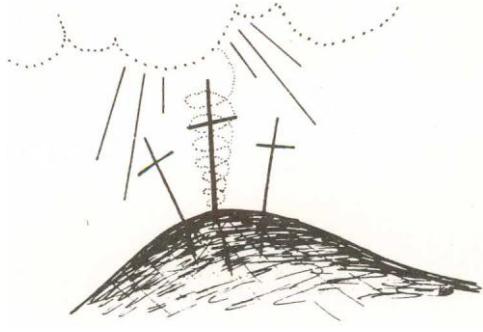
Use sin, as it will use you; spare it not, for it will not spare you; it is your murderer and the murderer of the world; use it, therefore, as a murderer should be used. Kill it before it kills you. You love not death, love not the cause of death (Richard Baxter).

Observe that this central word of the cross epitomises the heart of the Atonement – Christ in our stead being treated as sin itself!

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The names for the seven last words are from Arthur Pink.



CHAPTER 7

Patterns of Seven and Glimpses of Heaven (Part Two)

The Last Three Sayings, and the Christian's Creed

The Word of Suffering to the Spectators

"I thirst." (Jn 19:28).

As Samson thirsted after his tremendous battle wherein he slew hundreds (Jugs 15: 18), so now our Lord thirsts after his struggle has deteriorated his physical condition. Christianity is not asceticism. The body is one of God's gifts and is to be treated with respect. For the body's good we are to use but not abuse the things of this world. He had refused the opiate but accepts the sour ration wine.

This is the only word of physical pain uttered by Christ on the cross. How it rebukes us for our extreme sensitivity to bodily discomfort! If the innocent One suffered, is it strange that we sinners should often be physically chastised? We can draw comfort in our sufferings from remembering that Jesus sympathizes with us, for he too entered into our frailties and woes. He knows our desires and in his good time he will grant us what is right. All physical joys are his invention, not the devil's.

The words, "I thirst," signify his spiritual thirst also. Like many of the expressions voiced during this day of all days it has a double meaning. He thirsts for the love of his redeemed, and for fellowship with them. Behold the infinite condescension of our Christ. He made the mighty oceans, and streams and fountains, yet for us he consents to be thirsty.

The record says that "immediately one of them ran" to alleviate his thirst. How slow *we* have been and how deaf!

The Word of Victory to His People: Finished!

"It is finished!" (Jn 19:30).

Like the preceding cry, this is but one word in the original ("*tetelesthai*"), but that one word contains an ocean of significance. "It consolidated heaven, shook hell, comforted earth, delighted the Father, glorified the Son, brought down the Spirit, and confirmed the everlasting covenant."

It is the worker's cry of achievement and the sufferer's cry of relief. Note how it matches his first words in the temple: "Don't you know that I must be about my Father's business?" Throughout his ministry he was ever aware of the baptism with which he must be baptized – a baptism of blood. Now it is successfully finished.

It is a word from the first creation when God finished his work on the sixth day before entering into rest. So it echoes forth now on the sixth day before the Son rests from his labors of re-creation. The term befits a great work, a difficult work, and a perfect work. Twice more he will utter the words, once when his work of intercession in heaven ceases, and once when the new heaven and the new earth stand forth complete (Rev 16:17; 21:6).

Believer, rejoice! Your redemption is finished. All that was necessary to break down the barriers between you and God has been done.

The Word of Contentment to His Father

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Lk 23:46).

This was the child's goodnight prayer he had been taught by Mary. Again we see Christ's respect for Scripture, for he is quoting Psalm 31:5. Here is Christ's view of death. He implies that he is giving his life away in the certain hope of finding it again. No wonder Polycarp, Huss, Jerome of Prague, Luther, Melancthon and many others made these their last words also. It is good to remember that those who know how to pray continuously in life find it much easier to do so in death.

The record says that he cried with a *loud voice*. This is uncommon for a dying person in such a weakened state. Similarly, we read that "He bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (expired). "Who is he who thus easily falls asleep when He wills?" asked Bernard of Clairvaux. Here we have no helpless broken victim whose life ebbs away. What we have is the infinitely strong One choosing to die, purposefully depositing his life in heaven's charge. The word for "commit" was used for the placing of something valuable in the charge of a friend. The word translated "bowed" is one used for resting one's head on a pillow for sleep. The cross becomes God's pillow.

We have here the science of living and dying. All is to be done by faith in the infinite God. Neither life nor death has terrors for the one trusting in the God who is love. There can be *no final failure* for the Christian. Neither does he ever say goodbye for the last time to any who also believe.

As Christ bows his head, he seems removed from the title above it. At death we must all leave our titles and our "goods." Is it not best to deposit much of them with God beforehand and to say with David Livingstone:

I will place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interests of that kingdom it shall be given or kept, only as by the giving or keeping of it I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and in eternity.

This last word from Christ invites us to follow his example. Whenever anything distresses or alarms us, it is our privilege to commit it to God in prayer, practicing the continual realization of his presence and sufficiency, and resting in him. Why should we not be confident? Has not Christ defeated all our foes? Does he not now live to intercede for us? If Christ be for us, who can be against us?

Dr. J. J. Given has suggested a mnemonic for our remembering of the seven words as follows: *prayer, promise, provision, position, pain, perfection, presentation*. Think of them as peas in the pod of our Lord's last will and testament.

The seven words echo what Christ had been saying all his ministry. The first word about forgiveness reminds us of many things in his three

and a half years of gracious toil. Drawing from the parables we think of the bountiful Creditor who forgave his debtor ten thousand talents (Mt 18:23-35). The second word reminds us of the Good Shepherd who went after the lost sheep until he found it and brought it home to his Father's fold (Lk 15:1-7). The third saying echoes the charity of the Good Samaritan who provided at his departure for one he had come to love (Lk 10:29-37). In the fourth saying we see the humiliation of that despised Publican who would not look up but smote himself upon his breast (Lk 18:9-14). "I thirst" is reminiscent of the dying Lazarus, who lying at the gate of plenty, existed in want and nakedness (Lk 16:19-31). As for "It is finished," we may think of the parable of the shut door as the Bridegroom entered his Father's house (Mt 25:1-13). Lastly, the farewell prayer of committal is that of the good and faithful servant who having done all was invited to enter the joy of his lord appointed as ruler" over all that he (his Lord) hath" (Mt 25: 14-30).

But in simple, grateful terms we could say that all the sayings of Christ on the cross, as in his whole ministry, amount to one simple thing – God *loved sinners enough to die for them*. Are you a sinner? He died for you.

The Offices of Christ

Now let us look at Christ's offices as reflected in his sermon heads:

1. Priesthood. "Father forgive them"
2. Kingship. "Verily, I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise."
3. Humanity. "Woman, behold thy son"
4. The Substitute: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."
5. The Sufferer. "I thirst."
6. The Worker. "It is finished."
7. Faith's Exemplar. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

See also the interplay between his divine and human natures as revealed by these seven sayings. If the first saying points to his human weakness, the second indicates his divine omnipotence, while the third puts him back among mankind again. The fourth saying shows him absorbing all our sinful humanity yet sustaining the weight by his divinity. In the fifth again his likeness to us is stressed, but his unlikeness in the next saying where we behold him as the Master Workman. Finally our last view is that of the trusting Son of man.

We also find our creed in this sermon from the cross.

It does not have twenty-six or thirty-nine articles, but only seven.

1. The forgiveness of sins.
2. The eternal reward of all who hang their helpless souls on Christ, trusting only in his personal merits.
3. The church (symbolized by Mary) appointed to care for believing sons and to be cared for by them.
4. The death of their Representative and Substitute alone guarantees that believers will never be forsaken. That death honors that law more than the obedience of the whole human race could ever have done. The Son of God fulfills both the precepts and the penalty of the eternal code.
5. The Scriptures are trustworthy and must be fulfilled.
6. The atonement is complete and the justification of the race has been secured.
7. The dying do but sleep in God and their resurrection is certain.

More important than creed is behavior, though the latter usually issues from the former. The sayings of Christ teach us that our primary Christian duties are those of:

1. Forgiveness.
2. Faith and penitence.
3. The hallowing of family and church relationships.
4. Holding onto God even though apparently rejected.
5. Trust in Scripture.
6. Perfect obedience.
7. Resignation and contentment.

In essence, the duties of a Christian as expressed in the sayings of Christ from the cross amount to the simple precept, "Trust and obey."

The brilliant light streaming from the altar of Calvary is summed up in Christ's sayings, and that light is sufficient to guide the steps of any sinner, however weak and guilty, to the kingdom of God.



CHAPTER 8

Scenario for the Future, and Life-Style for the Present

The Cross and the End of the World

Many, including such well-known scholars as Christopher Wordsworth, Ronald Lightfoot, Hendrikus Berkhof, Alexander Maclaren, and Austin Farrer, have commented on the fact that the cross is an instructive pattern not only of today but also of the end of the world. Maclaren, for example, says, "... everything of the future history of the world and of the gospel is typified in the events of the crucifixion..."¹

Centuries before Bethlehem, Joel had foretold, as a sign of the end of the world, the darkening of the sun. And Daniel linked the Messiah's atonement with the end of sin and the ushering in of everlasting righteousness – not only in a legal, but also in an absolute sense (Joel 2:31; Dan 9:24-27). The account in the Gospels makes Christ "the first fruits" of the resurrection harvest. This does not mean a miniharvest long before the real thing, but the beginning of the actual endtime resurrection. Similarly, John declared the cross to be the judgment of the world (Jn 12:31), and in the opposite destinies of the two thieves, we see a parable of the sheep and goats separation. The whole New Testament accordingly can refer to Calvary as "the end of the world" (Heb 1:1; 9:26; 1 Jn 2:17; 2 Cor 10:13). J. H. Newman was thus right when he wrote:

Though time intervenes between Christ's first and second coming, it is not *recognized* (as I may say) in the Gospel scheme, but is, as it were, an accident. For so it was, that up to Christ's coming in the flesh, the course of things ran straight towards that end, nearing it by every step; but now, under the Gospel, that course has (if I may so speak) altered its direction, as regards His second coming, and runs, not towards the end, but along it, and on the brink of it: and is at all times near that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would run into. Christ, then is ever at our doors; as near eighteen hundred years ago as now, and not nearer now than then and not nearer when he comes than now.²

With all of this in mind, consider the events of the Passion with a view to the last crisis of earth. Because the body must have the same experience as its head, the church needs to understand the truth about its future as gleaned from the account of the sufferings of its Head.

Christ had climaxed his proclamation of truth by the wonder of the resurrection of Lazarus. Not long after we find him entering Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. He entered as a King and by so doing polarized his tiny world. The religious hierarchy of the day resented Christ's claims and his challenge of their reign over the people. Consequently, they plotted his death taking into collusion with them the leaders of other religious groups of the day. All this was not enough, however. They also needed the power of the state to fulfill their murderous design.

From the time of the crisis in Galilee when Christ's straight testimony caused those of his followers who were carnally motivated to fall away, till the betrayal by Judas, there was continuing attrition till only a little flock remained as believers in the Messiah. But they too were to be sifted by the threat of death, and he by a worse threat – that of separation from his Father. So we have Gethsemane where Christ sealed his decision to die for man at whatever cost. He would drink the cup to its dregs that the world might be redeemed. He would vindicate the honor of God the great King and Judge by fulfilling the penalty of the law as well as its precepts.

Just as surely the last crisis for his church will witness a people who are "obedient unto death," who choose the loss of all things earthly rather than dishonor their Creator and Redeemer by disobedience to his precepts.

When we turn to that book of the Bible which is dedicated to the theme of the end of the world, we have the last days of the body of Christ repeatedly described. The issue is again to be that of loyalty to God rather than men, his gospel rather than the religion of tradition, his laws rather than the laws of the state. Revelation 13 is known as the chapter of the last tribulation, for there Antichrist is seen as threatening the little flock of believers. How fascinating it is to observe that this chapter, while drawing from Old Testament themes, also weaves in the Passion of Christ. We have the empire of Pontius Pilate pictured as resurgent in a terrible ten-horned beast. The false priesthood of Israel is now symbolically embodied in a two-horned beast like a lamb but which speaks as a dragon, and which sets forth an image to be worshiped by all. The faithful experience their own Gethsemane and Calvary, for the church and state union results in a death decree for all who will not conform. The popular religion is urged upon all, but a little company from every nation, kindred, tongue and people refuse the mark of the beast and accept the sign of the cross – God's mark – indicating their decision to accept death rather than dishonor their Lord by disobedience. They are thus described – "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12; cf. 12:17). Even the kiss of Judas, the Gethsemane "sign," is duplicated by the mark of the beast. The Greek word for worship, repeatedly used in Revelation 13, embodies a root meaning "to kiss!"

In our soft, undisciplined age, religion has been vitiated, even the professed religion of Christ. The truth that law cannot justify has been perverted so that multitudes think that what cannot provide a perfect standing also fails as a standard. Because men are saved by grace and not by works, some have concluded that works of faith are no longer needed, that obedience is a light matter. They have not truly understood the cross. The Son of God died because of the violated law of God. He honored that law more by his death than if every son and daughter of Adam had kept it perfectly from creation on. Satan would have mankind believe that the cross which established the law (Rom 3:31) actually abolished it. A major reason for the rejection of the Messiah in the first century was his program of reform regarding the law of God. He accused the Pharisees of making void the commandments of God that they might keep their own tradition, and warned them that every plant which his Father had not planted would be rooted up. They had tarnished the merciful requirements of God by human excrescences. The Sabbath they made a burden, children were able to avoid their duty to parents, and marriage ties were loosened. All this Christ opposed at the risk of the completion of his mission. So it will be again (see Mk 3:6; Mt 12:14; Lk 6:11; Mal 4:4-6).

The reason the world does not receive the gospel is because too often the Word has not been made flesh in those who claim to believe it. The people of Nineveh repented when they saw and heard a man risen from the grave. The world will be shaken by the gospel when it sees men and women risen from spiritual death – men and women who, in strong contrast to the multitudes of earth, have learned to give God his place, knowing that he either matters tremendously or not at all. There is to be a disciplined church, no known denomination as such,

but the body of Christ which like the early apostles is resolved to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). They will proclaim the sacredness of life, the glory of purity, the privilege of worship, the obligation of truth, and remind those professing religion that in Eden nothing was said of faith or love or hope, for obedience was the sign of all these.

There was a test at the beginning of time, and there is to be a test at the close of time. A false worshipper received a mark at the beginning of earth's history (Gn 4: 15), and so it will be at the end, for the majority of earth's inhabitants (Rev 13:16). As Abel had faith in the blood of the coming Messiah and was a worshiper in harmony with God's requirements, so there is to be a church of Abels trusting in the blood of the lamb of God and showing that trust by implicit obedience to his requirements about worship and service. Such a company will as surely excite the wrath of the world as Christ did in his day. They too will experience betrayal, false charges, corrupt tribunals and ultimately the decree of death (Rev 11:7-10; 13:16-18). But the same Word promises resurrection and glory for those who through faith are obedient even unto death (Rev 11:12; 20:4). The totalitarianism of old Rome is to be revived again (Rev 13: 3,17). Men will try to erect a global state with a humanistic religion as the last means of finding world peace. Education, science, economics, politics, war – all will have failed. So religion will be hailed as a political Messiah. The words of Will Herberg, Stephen Neill and Arnold Toynbee are appropriate.

Will Herberg remarks:

The twentieth century is the age of totalitarianism. Not only does a great portion of the human race live under pervasive totalitarian rule, but totalitarianism emerges as a crucial problem at every level of twentieth-century life, and is largely at the source of the great conflicts – economic, political, and spiritual – that are tearing apart the contemporary world... The confusion in the churches is itself a major factor exacerbating the crisis and facilitating the advance of totalitarianism on many fronts.

Direct and conscious confrontation with totalitarianism did not arise for the mass of Christians in Western Europe and America, and for the Church as such, until the appearance of Nazism as a massive power on the continent of Europe .

... the totalitarian State... is the contemporary embodiment of the *illegitimate* State pictured in Rev., ch. 13 It deifies and exalts subjects; it runs constantly *contra legem Dei*... it refuses to recognize, and strives incessantly to destroy, man's personal being and his God-relationship.³

Notice the observation of Stephen Neill:

The darkest shadow of all on the life of the Church has been its alliance with the State and its belief in coercion and violence as means for the promotion of belief or the cure of unbelief.⁴

Finally, the words of historian Arnold Toynbee:

By forcing on mankind more and more lethal weapons, and at the same time making the world more and more independent economically, technology has brought mankind to such a degree of distress that we are ripe for the deifying of any new Caesar who might succeed in giving the world unity and peace.

We can foresee that, when world government does come, the need for it will have become so desperate that mankind will not only be ready to accept it... but will deify it... The virtual worship that has been paid to Napoleon, Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler and Mao indicated the degree of idolization that would be the reward of an American or Roman Caesar who did succeed in giving the world a stable peace at any price.⁵

(See the author's commentary on the Apocalypse for much more detail on this subject).⁶

The Cross and the Law

Theology has always found its touchstone in the manner it relates grace and law, God's part and ours, faith and works, justification and sanctification. All true theology has learned to distinguish without separating those things that God has joined together from the beginning. Unless a Christian learns to distinguish justification from sanctification, he may lose his assurance because of his weaknesses and failures. He dare not look to his sanctification as evidence that he is right with God. But if a Christian, on the other hand, separates rather than distinguishes law from grace, he may become an antinomian and disgrace his Lord. When the reformers asserted that only those who rightly related law and gospel were true teachers of the latter, they were in every sense correct. This principle of distinction, but not separation, applies not only to the manner of describing the nature and work of the members of the Trinity and the various biblical covenants, but also to the elements of soteriology.

Christ died for our sins. His was an atonement for our transgressions and iniquities. Such is the testimony of both Testaments (1 Cor 15:3; Dan 9:24; Is 53:5, 8, 11-12). Sin, iniquity, transgression – all have to do with a wrong relationship to law (1 Jn 3:4; Rom 7:7-10).

Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between Calvary and the law of God. In an age where self-discipline is a rarity and antinomianism is fashionable even in religion, these facts are tremendously significant, even imperative for our understanding if we are to live aright and conquer in life's battles.

While the New Testament is ever opposed to law as a *method*, it is never opposed to God's eternal moral precepts as a *standard*. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good" (Rom 7:12). From Matthew to Revelation, we have repeated emphasis upon obedience (Mt 5:18-19; 7:21; Lk 6:46; Jn 14:15; 15:10; 1 Cor 7:19; Rom 8:4, 7; Jas 2:10-12; 1 Jn 2:3; Rev 12:17; 14:12). Our Lord, as our example, was "obedient unto death" (Php 2:8).

Because the cross is a paradigm of reality, we would expect to see in it the warp and woof of sin and righteousness, hate and love, good and evil. And it is even so. We have the malice of the Pharisees and the scribes, the covetousness of Judas, the vacillation of Pilate, the weakness of Peter and the other disciples, the indifference of the passersby and the soldiers, and the passions of the mob. On the other hand, there is the love of Christ, the submission of Simon of Cyrene, the penitence of one of the thieves, the constancy of Mary and the other women and John, and the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus at last.

Christ summed up the law of God as revolving around the foci of love to God and man. Thus he comprehended in principle, the two tables of the Sinaitic Code. When the rich young ruler claimed to have kept the Decalogue from his youth up, Christ exposed that pretension by pointing out his selfishness and idolatry as shown by his attitude to wealth. The Jews who crucified Christ also professed loyalty to God's commandments, but the record is merciless in exposing their lovelessness.

But we should remember that we were all there that black Friday. Our sins were the nails that pierced him, our unbelief the spear that ripped open his side, and our pride broke his heart. To show the eternal nature of right and wrong and the binding obligation of the divine commandments, the Calvary narrative and the introduction to it make clear that the cross was the result of human lawlessness.

Temporalities have little place in the account of the cross because it is the lesson book of all ages. Pride, selfishness, hate, tradition, prejudice, church and state at their weakest and worst, corrupting power, conformity – all these ills belong to time itself and the whole world, not just the Jewish era and Palestine.

While the great emphasis in the Gospels is upon the iniquitous pride and prejudice of the religionists who brought about our Lord's crucifixion, it is interesting to observe that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are specific in their narration of the sins involved in the great drama they record.

For example, in his last public day of preaching and teaching, Christ accuses the religious leaders of being idolatrous and blasphemous, thieves and murderers, filled with lawlessness. Matthew 23 records the eight woes with which our Lord concluded his public work, in antithesis to the eight beatitudes of his earlier days.

Matthew 23:1-28 is one long condemnation of the idolatrous, formal religion of leaders who preached, but did not practice, who made broad the fringes of their garments representing heaven's law and likewise the phylacteries (leather boxes containing extracts from the law), who loved outward display and pomp and human praise but who defrauded poor widows. These leaders professed great reverence for the temple, but actually blasphemed the Lord of the temple by their placing of ordained forms and ritual above righteousness, mercy, faith, "the weightier matters of the law." Thus Christ indicted them as violators of both tables of the law, failing in love and reverence towards God, and love and compassion towards man.

Commandments Alluded to in the Passion Story:

The First and Second Commandments

"... we have no king but Caesar..." (Jn 19:15). ("Thou shalt have not other gods before me... thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image nor bow down and worship it..." (Ex 20:3-6).

The Third Commandment

"... and many other things blasphemously spake they against him" (Lk 22:65). "... and they that passed by blasphemed him..." (orig. Mt 27:39). ("Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain..." (Ex 20: 7).

The Fourth Commandment

"Now the next day [the Sabbath]... the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate.... Command therefore that his sepulcher be made sure.... Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (Mt 27:62-66). "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy..." (Ex 20:8-11). (Compare also Mk 3:6; Mt 12:14; Lk 6:11; Jn 5:18).

The Fifth Commandment

"... call no man your father upon the earth; for one is our Father which is in heaven" (Mt 23:9). The Pharisees desiring to be called Father thus broke the fifth commandment.

"... if God were your father ye would love me... ye are of your father the devil..." (Jn 8:42, 44). "... have we not all one father, hath not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10). "Honor thy father and thy mother..." (Ex 20:12).

The Sixth Commandment

"... against Jesus to put him to death" (Mt 26:59; 27:1; Mk 14:1, 55). "... killed the prince of life..." (Acts 3:15). "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex 20:13).

The Seventh Commandment

"... we have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19: 15). The Gospels show Christ dealing with Israel as a nation as well as with individuals. Constantly in the Old Testament, reliance upon other powers than Jehovah is classed as spiritual adultery "... friendship with the world is enmity with God. Ye adulterers and adulteresses..." (Jas 4:4). Backsliding Israel is likened to an adulteress in many passages of Scripture (see Hos 3:1; 9:2 and compare Rev 18; Eze 16, 23). "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14).

The Eighth Commandment

"... ye devour widows' houses..." (Mt 23: 14). "... he was a thief, and had the bag..." (Jn 12:6). "... and with him they crucify two thieves..." (Mk 15:27. "... you have made it a den of thieves" (Mt 21:13). "... they... took his garments..." (In 19:23). "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex 20:15).

The Ninth Commandment

"... we remember that that deceiver said ... " (Mt 27:63). "for many bear false witness against him..." (Mk 14:56). "... he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man..." (Mk 14:71). "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex 20: 16).

The Tenth Commandment

"And Judas... went unto the chief priests and said,... What will ye give me...?" (Mt 26:14-15). "For envy they had delivered him" (Mt 27:18). "Thou shalt not covet..." (Ex 20:17).

In strong contrast to these examples of contempt for the divine law by those responsible for the cross are the contrary cases of obedience, particularly in the person of our Lord who alone could say, "I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn 15:10). He places his Father first and last and central in his expressions on the cross, for he alone of all who have ever lived is innocent of idolatry and irreverence. He rests in the tomb on the Sabbath, making it the memorial of redemption as well as creation. This quiescence of the Divine Worker is the more remarkable inasmuch as the Sabbath was the only whole day our Lord was in the grave. See him remembering his mother in obedience to the fifth commandment and giving life to the penitent thief in contrast to all around him engaged in taking life. He

knows no adulterous liaison with the world, and he alone is a perfect steward of things and speech and thought as required by the last commandments of the Decalogue. Rightly do seven Passion testimonies agree that "he hath done nothing amiss."

His followers, likewise, illustrate obedience. For that liberality which is the opposite of covetousness see Matthew 27:57-60; for the spirit of true reverence, see John 20:28 and Luke 23:40; for true sabbathkeeping see Luke 23:56 and Matthew 24:20; for honor to parents, see John 19:27. Both tables of the law were fulfilled by the Master and his followers as we would expect when we recall the Lord's strong statements affirming the Decalogue just a few days or in some cases hours before his death (Mt 19:5-18; Jn 14:15; 15:10).

The religious leaders of Christ's day claimed to be zealous in upholding the law, but they crucified the Lawgiver. It may be in our age that we will see many claim to be zealous on behalf of Christ, the Lawgiver, who will yet crucify his law. But there is no antinomianism in true biblical Christianity. While law cannot save, the spirit of obedience is always the fruit of allegiance to him who has saved us by his grace. Not for God's sake only, but for our own, obedience is vital. To go against God's requirements whether found in nature or revelation is like spitting into the wind or stepping over a precipice. The universe is made to order, and the atoms march in tune – so it needs to be with us, if we are to be happy and fruitful in Christian service. True Christians of the last days, regardless of whatever community they may belong to, will be characterized by fidelity to both the gospel of grace and the commandments of God (see Rev 12:17; 14:12). This will be a far cry from the religion of our day whose statistics for immorality rival those of the unbelieving world.

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CHAPTER 9

Help! What the Kaleidoscope Reveals about Life and Death (PART 1)

The Good News About Dying While Living

Life Has the Mark of the Cross

Life is hell for most of us at some time or another, and sometimes for prolonged periods that seem aeons. Thus Calvary's pain can never be irrelevant. Recognizing the cross as in some sense a divine act, it must therefore be highly sacramental—an outward sign of something beyond itself – a pattern of universal reality. And it is not hard to see what is at least the one level of meaning that the cross has for everybody. There is no dodging pain, limitation, evil, inadequacy, and loneliness. *Every soul conceived must reckon with the experience of crucifixion.*

The very shape and outline of the cross is suggestive of anguish, for while it imitates the form of man, it contradicts his two strongest, natural instincts, the desire for action, and the yearning for rest. There man stretches out his arms up to meet no soft embrace, no kind reciprocating pressure; there his feet are made fast in the stocks; the iron enters into his soul; yet there transfixed, he is there transfigured, and he finds on Calvary his true Tabor.¹

How often we use the term "excruciating" to describe what we or someone else feels. The term, of course, means suffering like that involved in crucifixion. No one in this world, be he king, multimillionaire, genius, a physical Samson, or a Miss America, can avoid crosses in daily living. A world like ours, governed by inviolable law, inevitably gets in our way with considerable frequency. But far more often, *people* do. For like porcupines, when human beings come close to each other, there is risk involved. Each day, everyone must choose how to deal with the pinpricks or sword-thrusts which will inevitably come. As John Bright has reminded us:

... the redemption of man entails a Cross... to be sure we have no intention of abandoning the Cross. We enshrine it in the stained-glass window. We bow before it in prayer. But we want no part of it. We are possessed of the notion that the Cross is for Christ, a once and for all thing of the past tense with little relation to the destiny of the militant and victorious Church; indeed we feel it to be the business of church and religion to keep crosses far away, so our faith in the crucified Christ becomes to us a sort of charm to protect us from life's adversity. But there is a sense in which no true Christian can in any case escape the Cross. It needs no great catastrophe. The path of life is, however pleasant, dotted with crosses which men must bear. The question is not if we should bear them for bear them we shall, but only what sort of crosses they will be to us; will they be the Christian cross or a thief's? Will we find in them dumb brute agony, or the stuff of redemption?²

The One on the cross is known as "the Son of Man." He represents us all. In one sense all of life is a cross to which we are inescapably nailed—that is, inescapable till death. Life is a continuous crucifixion because of the pain, frustration, limitations, inadequacies, ridicule, darkness, mockery, bewilderment, shame, to which we must all be exposed in a sinful world and that continuously. There will never come a time in this life, when shadows will not be cast upon our pathway and when that pathway has no thorns.

But Life Is Not All Pain

Of course, it would be folly to magnify our ills and to pretend that life for us is nothing but crosses. Jeremy Taylor was right:

I sleep, I drink and eat, I read and meditate, I walk in my neighbour's pleasant fields and see all the varieties of natural beauty ... and he who hath so many forms of joy must needs be very much in love with sorrows and peevishness, who loseth all these pleasures and chooseth to sit upon his little handful of thorns.

Some of our troubles are but the other side of pluses in our world. G. K. Chesterton very wisely remarked that our real complaint is, not that the world is not reasonable, but that it's not entirely reasonable. Are we not inclined to take for granted the fact that our environment is a relatively stable affair? Suppose it were entirely chaotic, rendering us quite at a loss as to what might happen next. "If the specific gravity of lead might at any time become that of thistle-down; if pigs might fly" or the White House turn into green cheese, then life would be a nightmare indeed. However bad things are for any of us, they could be a lot worse.

Another thing that needs to be said, is that the troubles which are as real as the bread we eat and the air we breathe, may also be just as necessary. The world is a "vale of soul-making." It is a school wherein we have much to learn and also habits and prejudices to unlearn. The least companionable of persons is the one who has the least acquaintance with pain. "There is no cross like having no cross." As we build muscle by effort frequently exercised, so it is with the sinews of character and personality. Kites rise against the wind and so do all of us. Dead fish float downstream. Only live ones can go against the current. To remain alive we must fight under all circumstances continually.

The Truth About Death

The cross is also the truth about death. One of the words our Lord uses from the cross is the word "today," and another is "paradise." Life may terminate today and paradise is much closer than we think, for no one is conscious of the passage of time in death. What is certain is, that as Christ's cross was succeeded by the resurrection, so it shall be for all of us. To see Calvary without the *empty* tomb is like considering our days to be all darkness. The morning cometh, however dark the night. Winter is followed by spring, otherwise all of life is nonsense. As Emil Brunner assures us:

If death means that all is over; if there is nothing more, then every column in this life adds up to the same result—zero... if there were no eternal life, this life of time would be without meaning, goal, or purpose, without significance, without seriousness, and without joy. It would be nothing, for what ends in nothing is itself nothing. But our life does not end in nothing, but that eternal life awaits us is the glad message of Jesus Christ.³

Unless we are first clear as to the meaning of life, why we are here and where we are going, for life's sorrows there is neither sense nor

meaning. How you and I think of death makes all the difference to how we live. Only in Christ does human life find meaning. He did not idly say, "I am... the life," and "I am... the truth." He is the truth about all things, including life and death. If we are to be raised from the dead as he was, we must live in the spirit that he lived. We were born that we might become like him.

But more than that. All the gifts of this life are the result of Christ's cross. It was his volunteering in Eden to take man's place and his guilt and punishment, that saved the race from extinction there and then. Thus, everything we know that is good – life itself, food, drink, the air we breathe, the clothes we wear, our loved ones and friends – all are stamped with the cross of Calvary which bought them. Therefore, we own nothing. We are but stewards of the gifts of his grace, and all should be used to his glory. To live as though we were our own is to live as atheists and to die as fools. Only the right sort of life prepares for the right sort of death.

What Christ's Cross Teaches Us About How to Live

This is the theme of following sections also, and here we but introduce it. Christ on the cross spoke of Paradise as if to say that life finds its meaning in its ultimate objective. Everything must be viewed in the light of its final condition. And if eternal life is the prize, every moment of this life has solemnity, and no choice I make in thought, word, or deed, is insignificant. A pebble can influence the change of course of a river, and one careless choice can turn us away from Paradise. Bousset warns us:

There is nothing in life to be regarded with indifference; our destiny, our condition, or our vocation, has no mediocrity. Everything tends to serve or to ruin us infallibly.⁴

This reminder that each moment and each choice has eternal consequences for God and for ourselves glorifies the whole of life. Everything now has meaning and value. The most humble activities have a glory to them. As Herbert says, "Who sweeps a room as for thy laws, makes that and the action fine." The thought energizes one to ever do one's best, knowing it is never in vain so to do.

Seeing life as a brief probationary period to prepare for the hereafter places all things in right proportion. The eternal destiny of myself and all I can influence should interest me more than all the temporary tinsel of human experience. Christ has suffered that we might have eternal happiness. Shall we be so demented as to neglect something so valuable?

Such reflections cherished enable us to turn the kaleidoscope of thought aright. Against the backdrop of Calvary and eternity, everything in this life assumes a new shape. When the cross is engraved in our hearts, beneath its shadow the pride, the vanity, and folly of many of life's pursuits and values becomes apparent. Sensing that "out of the heart are the issues of life" and remembering his crown of thorns, our very imaginations will be dedicated to God. To crucify vain thoughts of pride, impurity, selfish ambition, irritability, and complaint becomes a prior concern. In thinking uselessly and aimlessly time is lost, no less than in speaking that way. The account we shall render for each shall not be very different. Furthermore, it is certain that in choosing my thoughts, I choose my habits and my destiny. Paul spoke of the cross as crucifying him to the world and the world to him (Gal6:14). In another place he tells us that once we understand the meaning of the cross we will recognize that because Christ died as our representative, legally we also died with him, and that therefore our sinful passions have no right to lord it over us any longer. The *Living Bible* translates a section of Romans 6 in the following manner:

Should we keep on sinning when we don't have to? For sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ; Through his death, the power of your old sinful nature was shattered. Your old sin-loving nature was buried with him by baptism when he died and when God the Father with glorious power brought him back to life again, you were given his wonderful new life to enjoy.

For you have become a part of him, so you died with him, so to speak, when he died; and now you share his new life, and shall rise as he did. Your old evil desires were nailed to the cross with him; that part of you that loves to sin was crushed and fatally wounded so that your sin-loving body is no longer under sin's control, no longer need to be a slave to sin... so look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God...⁵

According to these Scriptures, there are three days distance between me and the old life, between the one resurrected from spiritual death and the one controlled by passion and pride. A grave separates the Christian from his vain past. Henceforth his life is free to glorify God by loving and choosing whatever Christ loved and chose, disdaining and avoiding whatever Christ rejected. Like him, we'll be content with little and expect to suffer much. The equanimity he showed amidst the persecutions and mockery of men must be sought by us. That step-sister among the virtues, Patience, must be seen in her true light, that we might bear calmly the whims and inconsistencies of men. As love was the moving principle of our Saviour's actions, all our works are to be vivified by love, for it is the life of the heart as surely as truth is the light of the mind.

The Philosophy of Trial

First of all, we should see Calvary as the climax but not the conclusion, in order to know that none of our troubles are an end in themselves and neither shall they last forever. Our lord enjoyed fellowship and feasting on Thursday night. Part of that occasion was joyous singing. Then came Gethsemane, the Trials, and Calvary. But Calvary was not the end. Easter Sunday follows Black Friday. The glorified body replaces the wounded corpse. The mountain of ascension succeeds the valley of suffering, a crown of glory replaces the crown of thorns.

The old platitude "this too shall pass" is ever relevant. An old unschooled saint at a testimony meeting said his favorite verse was, "And it came to pass." When questioned as to why he esteemed this passage so highly, he replied, "When troubles come, I say, praise the Lord. Dis thing ain't come to stay, but to pass." It is true, troubles are not eternal – they only seem so. As in certain inclement climates, the natives say: "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes," even so, in climates inclement to the soul. Thomas A. Kempis declared, "My son, regard not thy feelings. For whatsoever they be now, they will shortly be changed into another thing." All this was true even for Christ.

Christ's sufferings on the cross lasted six hours, then came sleep followed by a glorious awakening. We, too, must see the resurrection as a sacrament as real as Calvary, testifying to sorrow's ultimate fruitfulness.

Secondly, Christ's cross was bearable to him because he lived in two worlds, not just one. Heaven and God were never absent from the Savior's heart. In his first and last saying on the cross, he uses the word, "Father" He knows who he is, he knows his real family, he knows he is not alone. Therefore, he ever interpreted the present in terms of the known past and the sure future. He knew that God attended the funeral of every sparrow and counted the hairs of every man's head. He knew God had delivered him from Herod's soldiers, from Satan in the wilderness of temptation, from that fox, Antipas, from all who sought to take him before his time had come. In calmness of soul, as

though walking in Nazareth's fields on a sunny day, he could promise Paradise to the penitent thief, and make provision for his mother and beloved disciples. Christ knew that however unbearable his pain might seem, God would not permit him to be tested above that which he was able – the One who loved him controlled the heat of the furnace and would ultimately bring him forth as gold.

Thirdly, Christ endured because his mind was filled with Scripture. Twice he quoted from Psalms, leading many commentators to think that in his mind he traced from Psalm 22:1 to 31:5. Our Lord's preoccupation, therefore, was not with pain nor fear, but with divine truth which brought trust, patience, and hope. In harmony with a spirit that results in faith in the word of God, we find that Christ had no antagonism towards his crucifiers. He labored for them even while on the cross, as he did also for his mother and John. Because of his conscious innocence, even the weight of imputed guilt did not divorce him from his Father, to whom he clung even when exposed to all the assaults of hell.

In the light of the cross, our trials and difficulties, our pain and humiliation should be viewed as so many steps drawing us closer to heaven. Poverty and humility were Christ's inseparable companions in life and death. Should we seek otherwise?

If life is a school to prepare us for the company of God, the angels, and the righteous ones of all ages, should we not see in all events, his servants ministering to our good? To recognize in life's crosses, whether they be the whims, pride, hatred, and folly of others, or our own failures, grist for God's mill and agents for the accomplishment of his eternal designs of love, ameliorates the very worst sufferings. A cross loved is only half a cross, because love sweetens and renders all things easy. A cross embraced becomes as wings to a bird and sails to a ship.

How different this philosophy from the one with which we were born! For some reason or other (no doubt it is our natural selfishness) from the first days of our lives we feel that the whole universe exists for our gratification, and that we are the legitimate center of all things. We measure men and things by the extent to which they minister to us or threaten us. Rarely does anyone stop to question this erroneous approach to living. Instead, it molds us and all our actions and reactions. Calvary, with its pain and shame, is God's protest against such folly. What a contrast is the cross to the pomp, ostentation, splendor, and magnification of trivia we see in the world!

If the cross is God's hallmark on life, why are we so slow to read the signals of our daily experience? Even with advancing years we are fools still. Impaired health, diminished strength, dimming sight, failing hearing – all frequently fail to tell the possessor that the rapids of death are nearing, and that preparation is imperative. We forget that we live in frail tents, and that soon our tent will be taken down, and we will after a time in the grave become that thing which has no name in any language. Only the Christian philosophy which rejoices in the believer's present possession of eternal life and heavenly citizenship can enable any to contend aright with life's overwhelming forces of deception, pride, passion, and pain.

In the light of the love displayed on Golgotha need any believer fear severity from a hand that has been pierced for him? Was not Christ torn with the briars and brambles of our thorny life in order to make the path more smooth for us? Is not the path before us traced with his blood and has not every thorn been moistened thereby? Will the chalice of suffering be so bitter if we remember that before he presented it to us he first drank it to the dregs?

For the person whose heart has been touched by the Christ of Calvary there can only be one attitude towards the crosses of life:

Lord, I hate pain, but I trust you. Wound me, if you must, in order to cure me; punish me, if need be, provided that you save me at last; but this I especially plead, permit me not to crucify thee afresh by neglecting or transgressing thy commandments, nor allow me to stray from absolute dependence on thy merits alone. Help me to know always that thou art love, whatever the "seemings."

We shall look at this same theme under some other headings for, here, as in all things, truth is polygonal not linear.

Overcoming Through Trust in God

Things are seldom what they seem. Like Christ, we must view everything in this world in the light of invisible realities. Wrote Isaac Watts, "Where reason fails with all her powers, there faith prevails and love adores." Trust in the absolute overruling providence of God is the only sufficient weapon in life's battle.

The kaleidoscope of faith enables the believer to view all circumstances as servants of God for his ultimate good. While he does not believe that God initiates evil, he knows that nothing can touch him except by divine permission and for his benefit. Joseph, reviewing the evil plots of his brethren against him, could say, "Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God did send me before you to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Gn 45:57). Similarly, the persecuted Christ in Gethsemane rebuked his disciples who were trying to extricate him from peril by saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn 18:11). Observe that he refused to recognize second causes. He does not say 'The cup which Judas has given me.' Complaining about life's buffetings is similar to the behavior of a dog which turns to bite the stick in his master's hand.

Had Simon of Cyrene arrived on the scene five minutes earlier or later, he would have missed the privilege of carrying Christ's cross – a privilege which brought to him the gift of eternal life. Had he traveled a different route around the city that day he would have missed the greatest blessing of his life. The choices which brought him so much blessing were the result of a divine choosing, not his own wisdom. Not our wisdom, not our striving, but the mercy and grace of God accomplishes all good for us.

Within the purview of a loving providence we must include mistakes and even sins. Christ had not been responsible for either, but his sufferings were the result of both. Yet this disturbed not his peace. Provided we are "in all things willing to live honestly" God's mercy overrules our failures (we speak not of any deliberate course of sin, for such separates a Christian from God and is a rare phenomenon). His love is not conditional on our becoming mental geniuses who never err.

Alexander Maclaren comforts us as follows:

Let us learn the lesson of quiet confidence in Him in whose hands the whole puzzling, overwhelming mystery lies. If a man once begins to think of how utterly incalculable the consequences of the smallest and most commonplace of his deeds may be, how they may run out into all eternity, and like divergent lines may enclose a space that becomes larger and wider the further they travel; if, I say, a man once begins to indulge in thoughts like these, it is difficult for him to keep himself calm and sane at all, unless he believes in the great loving Providence that lies above all, and shapes the vicissitude and mystery of life. We can leave all in His hands – and if we are wise we shall do so – to whom *great* and *small* are terms that have no meaning; and who looks

upon men's lives, not according to the apparent magnitude of the deeds with which they are filled, but simply according to the motive from which, the purpose towards which, these deeds were done.⁶

Confidence in a sovereign Providence which overrules all things enables one to say with Paul, "We look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen." Like Moses, we endure as seeing him who is invisible.

This conviction that all things are God's servants brings a confidence nothing can shake. So it has been with mature Christians in all ages. They have known that while the medicinal draught may be nauseous, it is a loving hand that administers it. We are to remember the words of Jesus, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (Jn 13:7). Said Spurgeon:

... as long as a man can look to God nothing is lost. FAITH – faith's motto is INVICTA – she ever rides forth upon the white horse conquering and to conquer.

Faith is the child of the Omnipotent, and shares in his omnipotence; it is born of the Eternal, and it possesses his immortality. You may crush and grind it but every fragment lives; you may cast it into the fire, but it cannot be burned, neither can the smell of fire pass upon it; you may hurl it into the great deeps but it is bound to rise again.

Faith has an *eye* that was made to drink in the sunlight, and so long as God is a sun, there will be eyes of faith to rejoice in him. If we have faith, there is that in us which overcomes the world, baffles Satan, conquers sin, rules life, and abolishes death, all things are possible to faith. Faith triumphs in every place notwithstanding that her life is one of continual trial. Sense is broken like a potter's vessel, and reason is frail as a spider's web; but faith abideth, and groweth, and reigneth in the power of the Most High...

You cannot banish faith – her home is everywhere. Get a firm confidence in God and you need not enquire what is going to happen – all must be well with you. Winding or straight, uphill or down dale, or through the fire or through the sea, if thou believest, thy road is the king's highway. If faith does not fail, nothing fails. Faith arms a man from head to foot with armour through which neither sword, nor spear, nor poisoned arrow can ever pierce. No weapon can prosper against thee. Thou art as safe as he in whom thou believest for "he shall cover thee with his feathers... his truth shall be thy shield and buckler"...

Faith is taking, grasping, possessing, feeding, but first of all LOOKING. There is life in a look. There is heaven in a look... even when we are at our worst let us trust with unshaking faith... to trust Christ when thou hast a shallow sense of sin is but a slender trusting him; but to believe that he can cleanse thee when thy heart is black as hell, when thou canst not see one good trait in all thy character, when thou seest nothing but fault and imperfection about thine entire life, when all thine outward circumstances seem to speak of an angry God and all thine inward feelings threaten thee with doom from his right hand: this is to believe indeed, such faith the Lord deserves of thee.⁷

Present Healing from the Tree of Life

Two of Christ's seven sayings from the cross are quotations from Scripture (Ps 22:1; 31:5). He interpreted all that happened in the light of the Word of God which was never absent from his mind. Scripture contains approximately three thousand promises and these are leaves from the biblical Tree of Life for the healing of our hearts and lives in the here and now. One who is distressed should repeat often to himself such passages as the following:

Romans 8:28, 38, 39: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 5:3: "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance..."

2 Corinthians 4:8-10; 16-18: "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Lamentations 3:21-26; 57:

This I recall to my mind.

Therefore I have hope.

Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed,

Because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning;

Great is Your faithfulness.

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,

"Therefore I hope in Him!"

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,

To the soul who seeks Him.

It is good that one should hope and wait quietly

For the salvation of the LORD.

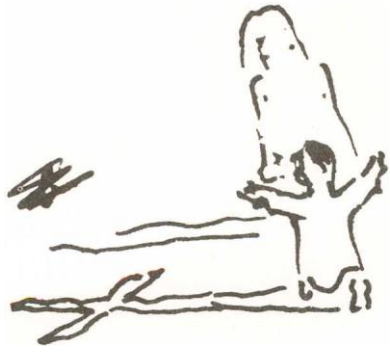
....

You drew near on the day I called on You,

And said, "Do not fear!"

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CHAPTER 10

Help! What the Kaleidoscope Reveals about Life and Death! (Part Two)

Law, Liberty, Love-But Trust, Trust, Trust!

The Reality of Right and Wrong

Good and evil are as distinct as love and hate, life and death, night and day, Christ and Satan. When we are tempted to think that the quality of our decisions doesn't matter, go to Calvary. They matter and matter intensely. Our sins crucified God and will crucify us as well unless we forsake them. At the cross we see what sin deserves – ridicule for its folly, scorn for its pettiness, shame for its audacity.

The Fact of Inexorable Law

Christ established the law more by his death than if every son and daughter of Adam had kept it perfectly. God would rather be crucified than revoke a jot or tittle of his law. At the beginning of Scripture we have one who lost Paradise through his disobedience. At the close of Scripture it is emphasized that those who will reenter Paradise have been obedient to "the commandments of God," the fruit of their faith in the Redeemer (Rev 12:17; 14:12). And at the heart of Scripture is one who was "obedient to death, even the death of the cross" (Php 2:8). In Eden nothing was said about faith or love or hope. "Obey" was the sole word, for obedience from the heart enshrines all the virtues. Similarly, in the parable of the judgment, Christ says nothing about theology or creeds but only inquiries about behavior – "inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me" (Mt 25:45). , "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (Lk 6:46). "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (Jn 13: 17). "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15).

But Law Cannot Save

Law was only perfect for perfect people – Adam and Eve before the Fall. Once we have violated law by a feeling, a motive, an inclination, a word or deed, it can only ever after bring us condemnation and guilt, for law demands perfection. To be saved, we must "die to law" as a method, though never as a standard (Gal 2:19; Rom 7:4). The penitent thief had often been exposed to law, but it did nothing for him except condemn him. When he saw before him that law as incarnate love in the person of Jesus, then he was redeemed. Observe the contrasts between law and gospel:

LAW

Tells us what we should do

GOSPEL

Tells us what God has done.

LAW

"This do, and thou shalt live."

GOSPEL

"Live and thou shalt do."

LAW

"Pay me what you owe."

GOSPEL

"I frankly forgive you all."

LAW

"The wages of sin is death."

GOSPEL

"The gift of God is eternal life."

LAW

"The soul that sins, it shall die. "

GOSPEL

"Whosoever believes, though he were dead yet shall he live."

LAW

"Cursed is everyone who does not do all things in the law all the time with all that he is and has"

GOSPEL

"Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered."

LAW

"Make you a new heart."

GOSPEL

"A new heart will I give you."

LAW

"You must love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength."

GOSPEL

"Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave his son for us."

LAW

Condemnation and death

GOSPEL

Justification and life

LAW

Requires holiness

GOSPEL

Provides holiness

LAW

3000 sermons on law may not convert one soul.

GOSPEL

One sermon on the gospel (at Pentecost), converted 3000 souls.

LAW

Brings gloom, defeat, frustration and despair.

GOSPEL

Brings joy, victory, satisfaction, and hope.

All the Saved Will Be Saved by Grace Alone

The penitent thief is the model of all who are forgiven and granted Paradise. He could run on no errands for Jesus as his feet were tied. He could not use his hands for him. His past showed only failure and his future pledged only gloom and despair. But he saw the love of Christ and clung to it. He opened his mouth with faith and won eternity. Observe the effect upon him that contemplation of Christ on the cross brought-for we too must experience the same effect. He acknowledged his own guilt in contrast to the perfect innocence of Christ. He testified for his master, but showed love to his erring brother by caring enough to rebuke him.

The Knowledge of God as Father Enables Us to Treat All Men as Brothers

See how kindly Christ judges his crucifiers. "... they know not what they do." How different to our habit of harsh judgment. The law has two tables and only those who observe the first can keep the second. No man can love his neighbor as himself who does not love God supremely.

Our Lord's prayer for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is a model for us. Much of our suffering grows out of nourished antagonisms within. The person who hates cannot rest, cannot laugh, cannot trust. Christ refused to be harsh in his judgments and so must we. We are to do our utmost to destroy our enemies by making them our friends. Remembering how little we know about the hereditary and environmental factors which have shaped the thinking and conduct of others, we would be wise to refuse to clamber into the judgment seat. He who loves – lasts, but he who hates is already dying at an accelerated rate.

Despair of nobody. If the thief originally cursed Christ but was transformed by the living Gospel beside him, so it can be with the most apparently hopeless.

The Failure of the Disciples Was Due to Their Inability to Watch With Him One Hour

Most of the twelve were in hiding while Christ was dying. In Gethsemane he had bidden them watch and pray but they fell asleep, awakening to his loving rebuke:

"Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Gethsemane for the disciples had been a trial run of Calvary. Because they failed in the first, they failed in the second. Pascal was entirely right when he said all the ills of men come from their refusal to sit still. When man was made, the first thing he saw was the face of God which had kissed him awake. He was made in the image of God and was meant to retain that image by setting God ever before him as a pattern. His first whole day was given to fellowship with his Maker and in the heart of the law given from Sinai was the decree about regularly spending time with the Creator in holy adoration learning of him and his ways. The Sabbath command made provision for the learning of all the others. "Whatever gets our attention gets us." "By beholding we become changed." If one momentarily sees the sun through half-closed eyes, its image will remain on what we see immediately thereafter. Only those who take time to gaze at God can take him seriously throughout the conflict with temptation and sorrow.

God either matters tremendously or he doesn't matter at all. If we are fully dependent upon him we can be independent of all else. But if he

is not Lord of all, it is entirely true that he is not Lord at all. "Whosoever will do the will of my Father, the same is my mother, brother, and sister."

We can only love God when convinced that he loves us. That's why the parables of God's seeking, forgiving love in Luke 15 follow the stringent demands of Luke 14 where it is made plain that no man is a Christian who does not love Christ more than all else, including his own life. Therefore it is ever true that adoration is our chief duty and our highest wisdom. And where better to adore than around the cross! It has been said truly that, kneeling at the foot of the cross, man has reached the highest place he can attain, for to take the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. Now we see why Scripture gives so much space to our Lord's passion. It is meant to be the chief theme of our meditation as well as the controlling motive in all our conduct.

Do What You Can and Don't Fret About What You Can't

Part of our Gethsemanes and Calvaries are the frustrating limitations thrust upon us. In difficult circumstances our hands also seem nailed to a cross and our feet spiked. Happy is that person who recognizes the reasonableness of God and knows that he is only responsible for doing what he can do in that particular situation. Christ could not run to Mary and embrace her lovingly, but he used his tongue – the only unrestricted member of his body – to comfort her.

Remember that when two duties conflict, one ceases to be a duty. Many of us are overextended and thus invite disaster. Only those duties which can be done without violating the laws of God belong to us. It is not our responsibility to do all the good we can, but to do that which God's providence indicates is our special task. If our burdens leave us exhausted, fretful, barren of Christ's peace, we can be sure we have gathered obligations God has not appointed us. It is rested sheep that God leads (Ps 23:2).

Sufficient Unto the Day Is the Evil Thereof

Christ does not use the words "yesterday" or "tomorrow" on Calvary, but he does use "today." Blessed is that person who has learned to live in day-tight compartments. The regrets about yesterday added to the concerns of tomorrow make a load too heavy for anyone to carry. Only one day is ours – this day, and anyone can carry a day's load if he does it with God. "Be the day weary, or be the day long, at length it ringeth to evensong." "Yard by yard, life is hard. Inch by inch, it's a cinch."

Gratitude and Joy Bring Healing

Helmut Thielicke reminds us:

A good part of our discouragement stems from our constant preoccupation with ourselves. We take ourselves so awfully seriously. And when we do that, everything in life goes haywire. Our worries blow themselves up into immense bugaboos; our little self-conceits play a disproportionate role, and if they are disappointed they never stop gnawing at us. "We build castles in the air and drift further from our goal." Most of our miseries arise, not because we find ourselves in an objectively miserable situation, but because we define both misery and joy in a false way – with reference to ourselves. Most of our neuroses too derive from this same self-centeredness.¹

The best way to reduce our pains is to practice thanksgiving. This is the sovereign path to lasting joy. *How we choose to turn our mental kaleidoscope determines all else...* "Whatever gets your attention gets you." None of us is so badly off, we could not be worse. Everyone of us has a multitude of causes for gratitude. Think of Christ's terrible sufferings on Calvary – did he too have reason for gratitude? The marvelous faith of the penitent thief irradiated Christ's sky and filled him with joy. To be trusted, when all outward circumstances denied his claims, was a miracle which brought with it rejoicing and thanksgiving.

He or she who feels excruciating pain would do well to remember the old hymn, "Count your many blessings, count them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done." Remember the little frail lad at school who, when asked by his teacher to name one of his blessings, said, "my glasses." On being asked the reason he added, "Because of my glasses the boys won't hit me and the girls won't kiss me." There is always something for which to be thankful.

Keep "Things" in Their Right Perspective

By "things" we mean the physical treasures of life. On leaving life at Calvary, as entering in at Bethlehem, our Lord did not even have clothes. Only one of his prayers touched anything outside of personal relationships. "I thirst." When God from Sinai gave man principles for happiness he included guidance in priorities. The order was God, family, others, things. Only in the tenth commandment do things become the center of attention. If we reverse the divine order, putting things first, then other people before our families and God, we invite sorrow and disaster. "Without things man cannot live, but he who lives for things alone is not a man." The Christian is neither an ascetic nor an epicurean. He chooses to use rather than abuse the things of this world. They are always subsidiary to personal relationships. Those fathers who spend more time polishing their shoes each day than they do with their children are begging for trouble. And others who concentrate more on money-making than friendships will rue it at last. Multitudes are thus sowing to the wind and will reap the whirlwind.

The folks who spend their days
In buying cars and clothes and rings
Don't seem to know that empty lives
Are just as empty filled with things

The wise remember that we are rich not only in what we have but in what we cannot lose. Anything that can be taken from us was never ours in the first place! The believer can lose nothing of value. Like the three worthies in the fiery furnace, he will in life's crucible lose only his bonds.

Read Acts 27 – in life's voyage, item after item must be thrown overboard. Because for all there is a wreck at the close of life, cling only to the wood of the cross which will carry us to the shore (see also Jon 4). All Life's gourds under which we shelter will be cut down by worms. Only our God is safe and secure for us, and in him alone we are safe.

A Good Conscience – A Life Belt in Deep Waters

Provided our hearts do not condemn us, we are able to survive any outward trouble. To have a clear conscience is worth more than the riches of Croesus. When Luther came to understand the gospel and received the gladness of acceptance with God he cried out, "Strike

Lord, do what thou wilt, now that my sins are forgiven, nothing else matters."

Keeping a good conscience does not mean never making a mistake. It means rather the cherishing of the good news that God sees us only in his Son – complete in Christ, accepted in the beloved, without condemnation. Justification is not just the blessing at the beginning of the Christian life. It is continuous, for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth (goes on cleansing) us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). Our standing before God, and our actual state in ourselves, are distinct and should never be confused. All his days the Christian is a sinner, not in the sense of willfully pursuing known sin, but in the sense that his ever-widening understanding of right and duty simultaneously reveals his shortcomings. But not only is the Christian always a sinner, but he or she is also always a penitent and always right with God (Rom 8:1; Col 2:10; Eph 2:6; Jn 13:10).

The Jewel of Humility

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This beatitude has a significance in times of trouble that few have dreamed of. It is our pride which is chiefly wounded by "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Why should this happen to me? is our querulous outburst. Consider Andrew Murray's beautiful description of the first of Christian virtues:

Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is for me to have no trouble, never to be fretted, or vexed, or irritated, or sore, or disappointed. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord where I can go in, and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and be at peace as in a deep sea of calmness when all around and above is trouble. It is the fruit of the Lord Jesus' redemptive work on Calvary's cross manifest in those of His own who are definitely subjected to the Holy Spirit.

The Only Freedom No One Can Take from You

You cannot choose circumstances, but you can always choose your reaction to circumstances. You cannot avoid the cross, but you can choose what sort of cross it becomes. The thief on the left of Christ had sin *on* him (guilt), and sin *in* him (depravity). But the thief on the right had sin *in* him but not *on* him, and he died in ecstasy despite physical pain – all because he chose to use his cross to lead him into a right relationship with the Man on the center cross who had sin *on* him (by divine imputation) but not *in* him.

Those who take the lemons of life and turn them into lemonade, who accept the thorns and weave them into a crown, these shall live forever. As for the trauma in our pilgrimage, we remember that those who have found a "why" for life can put up with almost any "how." God works through those who see mercy in misery, light in darkness, life in death, and joy in the loss of all things.

To Doubters

It's nothing to be ashamed of. He that has never doubted has never half believed. If you begin with certainties, you may end with doubts, but if you begin with doubts you may end with certainties. Everything in existence is related to everything else, and one would have to know everything about everything, to know everything about anything. Only God can do that. You and I must always base our decisions, not on demonstrable proof, but on a weight of evidence. That applies to choosing a vocation, a life-partner, and thousands of lesser choices.

Doubt is not all bad. One could not doubt at all unless truth existed, just as there can be no shadow unless there is a light somewhere. Our capacity for doubt indicates our capacity to know and therefore our divine origin. Mature thinkers are not afraid of doubts, but they learn to doubt their doubts and believe their beliefs, rather than doubting their beliefs and believing their doubts. You must do one or the other and only one makes sense. And always remember that when one man cried out to Jesus saying, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," Jesus did (Mk 9:24).

The real point of this note, however, is to bid you observe the marvel of the pattern we have been discussing, for such observation will dispel doubt. We have taken a historical person and a historical event and found it to be a microcosm of the universe, a pattern of reality in many layers, something as relevant now as 2,000 years ago.

It is beyond the capacity of chance to give birth to an event as many faceted as the Calvary event with each facet of such tremendous significance. The time, the place, the manner of our Lord's death – each positively shrieks with meaning. Each event of the Passion has depths that no man can fully plumb. The fulfillment of scores of Old Testament types and predictions by events compressed into the hours of a single day is a miracle in itself. One can say about the death of Christ what was said about the sword of Goliath, "There is none like it." Why not? Why are there not thousands like it out of the untold millions of deaths since time began?

The symbols of the garden, the tree, the blood, the garment, the riven side, the veil, the earthquake, the darkness, the nature and location of that cross suspending its victim between heaven and earth as rejected by both, with its extremities comprehending above and below and the whole horizon; the hidden parabolic meanings of words spoken by various parties such, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people," "He saved others, himself he cannot save," all testify to an infinite design planned from eternity for our good. Observe, adore, and believe.

Handling Doubt and Pain

When John Ruskin wished to contrast the works of men with the work of God he wrote as follows, and his words are appropriate to the distinction between inspired and uninspired historical narration:

Our best finishing is but coarse and blundering work after all. We may smooth, and soften, and sharpen till we are sick at heart; but take a good magnifying glass to our miracle of skill, and the invisible edge is a jagged saw, and the silky thread a rugged cable, and the soft surface a granite desert... God alone can finish; and the more intelligent the human mind becomes, the more the infiniteness of interval is felt between human and divine work in this respect.²

When Christ cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" it is apparent that he was clinging to God despite the collapse of everything around and within. He could not see good, he did not feel good, but by faith he still reckoned on the supreme goodness of God who would ultimately make all things right. Observe that no uninspired writer would have chronicled such words. Here is the ring of truth.

It is not wrong to ask, "Why?" But unless we ask it of One we know as Father, there will never be an answer. When Christ with his last breath prayed, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," he displayed the same attitude in dying as throughout all his living – trust and

confidence in God. The word "commit" in this prayer means to entrust, to deposit. How perfect the cross is in meeting our every need – even our despair.

Only Knowledge of God as a Loving Father Can Enable Us to "Hang on" and to Do All Things Aright

Our Lord's first and last sentence began with "Father." When we accept all of life as coming from our heavenly Father, both the things he initiates and the things he permits, then there is peace, even amid the chaos and the darkness and the terror.

The Second Look at the Cross

Sometimes we talk about the objective and subjective sides of Christianity. Objectively Christ is all, but subjectively faith is all. Objectively all was done for me by Christ on the cross, subjectively all is done in me by the Holy Spirit. Justification is the objective reality appropriated, but sanctification is a continuous subjective experience as God works in me to will and to do that which is right.

The first look at the cross is the objective look. That is, we see the event as something outside of ourselves. Christ died for me there on Calvary. But the second look on the cross is subjective – I see that I was crucified with him (see Gal 2:20; 6:14). This is one meaning of my baptism as Paul explains it in Romans 6.

If Christ had done everything except go to the cross, we would never have been redeemed. And similarly my church-going, tithe-paying, etc., without going to the cross is valueless. An unsundered, uncrucified will can defeat God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and destroy its possessor forever. The really crucial thing to remember is that self can never cast out self. The expulsive power of a new affection must never be forgotten. It is my dwelling upon the Atonement that changes my mind and heart and makes surrender a glad event, a very precious privilege. For this reason, it has often been said that adoration is a Christian's first duty. To look upon Christ and adore him leads to all else necessary.

Certain it is that we are saved not by one cross but by two – Christ's and our own. Ruthlessly we must nail down our selfish nature to the hard wood with resolute unrelenting blows; and like the crucifixion squad, must sit and watch it with hard eyes, writhe and plead how it may, until it die. We must be crucified with Christ, must die with him, and rise with him into a new way of living and being.³

This cruciform Christian experience is only possible through faith, through the trust that believes God is good in all that he does or permits, and that holds onto the merits of Christ despite failures and incessant trial. Such faith "overcomes the world" (1 Jn 5:5), and can never fail. It alone is necessary for acceptance with God, but it ever leads the believer to crucify his vices, doubts and fears.

My spirit on Thy care
Blest Saviour I recline;
Thou wilt not leave me to despair,
For Thou art love divine.
In Thee I place my trust,
On Thee I calmly rest;
I know Thee good, I know Thee just,
And count Thy choice the best.
Whate' er events betide,
Thy will they all perform;
Safe in Thy breast my head I hide,
Nor fear the coming storm.
Let good or ill befall,
It must be good for me,
Secure of having Thee in all,
Of having all in Thee.

– Henry F. Lyte

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1. *How Modern Should Theology Be?* (London, 1970), pp. 79-80.
2. Ruskin quoted in *Interpreter's Bible*, "John," p. 785.
3. *Ibid.*, 8:779,



CHAPTER 11

A Conversation with the Maker of the Kaleidoscope

Me: But Lord, I see when I look at you that I am crooked and cross.

Christ: Come unto me all ye... He who cometh to me I'll in no wise cast out. All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

Me: But Lord, my experience and feelings are such a kaleidoscope of turgid colors. All I see is crooked and makes me cross.

Christ: Not all you see, my child. All you often choose to contemplate.

Me: But Lord, I keep making mistakes.

Christ: My son, read Romans 7: 14-25. The best of the apostles had the same problems. As life goes on, and I mean the Christian life, you will have increasing insights as to the radical nature of your disease as well as its cure, but nevertheless, you are accepted every step of the way as perfect.

Me: Lord, I'm up one day and down the next. I am not stable and life is never the same. Is there anything sure and stable and secure?

Christ: I am the Lord. I change not. I am the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. From everlasting to everlasting I am God. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

Me: Thou art righteousness, and the law to me is bad news. It condemns me. You are bad news because you are so holy. I want good news.

Christ: I came not to condemn the world but to save the world. The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost. He has come to minister and to give his life a ransom forever. I came to bring good, glad, and merry tidings. I stand at the door of every heart and knock, for I want to be guest with him that is the sinner. I have reconciled the whole human race to God and the only barrier between anyone and me is unbelief.

Me: I believe it but I cannot keep concentrating on those truths. The kaleidoscope of my daily experience whirls. It makes me giddy, angry, fearful, cross.

Christ: I offer you another kaleidoscope. Say not that you are crooked and cross. I was treated as crooked for your sake. To expiate the contradictions of existence, I hung on the symbol of contradiction – the cross. I absorbed life's ambiguity, contradictions, shame, sin, and loss. Because you and all others are crooked and cross, there is no dodging the cross of pain. But if you lift Calvary's cross, it will lift you. Instead of being a hair shirt, an insult, a duty, it will become velvet, a crown, a privilege. Your only hope amid life's kaleidoscopic experiences is to rivet your gaze on the kaleidoscopic Calvary and its cross. There you will find the gospel.

Me: Tell me this gospel again, Lord. You've told me, but I'm hard of hearing. Besides that, I'm tired of religion. There are too many disappointments, too many hypocrites.

Christ: Child, religion crucified me and myriads of others. It is often counterfeit and not real. But my gospel never disappoints. Keep in mind that it's only the very good that can be made the very bad. Parasites can only live off the living, not the dead. It's not a stone in the road that gives off a stench, but a dead animal that was once a living thing. Sex, politics, religion, and many other things that are excellent rightly used, become dreadful when abused. Besides all that, my name is not religion but love. And my gospel in a nutshell is this – I took your place that you might have my place. Your sins were imputed to me that my righteousness might be imputed to you. The imputing of your sins to me did not make me a sinner, but I was treated as one. The imputing of my righteousness to you does not make you immediately one hundred percent perfect, but you are treated as though you were. That's the gospel, and it's all yours for the taking, and the taking we call faith.

Me: But Lord, sometimes it sounds complicated – too complicated for me.

Christ: It is really simple. Many will be lost because they are looking for something complicated. That was almost the way it was with Naaman the leper who wanted a complicated healing process rather than a simple one. The gospel, my child, is simple. It is present. It is available. It is John 3:16. It is the offer of an exchange. See 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 5:10-13; Ephesians 2:8, 9. "For by grace are you saved by faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God." Remember the "whosoever" of John 3:16 includes black and white, young and old, wise and foolish-it includes you. And it includes you at every stage of your experience, when you are a success, when you are a failure, when you have done the right, and when you've done the wrong, when you're cheerful, when you're despairing, when life is good, when life is bad. God is never dissatisfied with you or discouraged with you while you are looking to the cross. Child what more could I say? You are loved. Therefore come, and keep coming, though you stumble a million times.



CHAPTER 12

Don't Just Look – Sing!!

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh 8:10).

Tertullian said that every true Christian is hilarious. Certain it is that the saints of history have been renowned for their cheerfulness even in martyrdom. There never has been such a thing as a continuously unhappy Christian.

The believer in Christ has found meaning, life, motivation, forgiveness, communion with God, fellowship, strength. He is in step with the universe and everything is (ultimately) going his way. The only right response to the gospel is to be delirious with joy, and therefore every consistent Christian is radiantly enthusiastic. The accusation made against the apostles at Pentecost may well be made against any who believe Christ rose from the dead. "These men are filled with new wine." New wine indeed! A joy the world had never known before.

G. K. Chesterton in one of his ballads declared, "The men who are signed with the cross of Christ go daily in the dark." A Christian can walk with Christ at midnight on a shoreless sea knowing that the future is as bright as the promises of God and that the best is yet to be. Dr. Samuel Johnson described John Wesley as the most radiantly happy man he had ever met. Let it not be forgotten that Charles Wesley wrote literally thousands of hymns and set the nation of England to singing. Although Christians also have their times of heaviness through manifold trials, their characteristic song is not a dirge but a hallelujah chorus.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field which when a man findeth, for joy thereof he selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field" (Mt 13:44). "For joy thereof" – that is the keynote in Christian motivation. Every true Christian knows that no self-denial is for its own sake, but is clearly a matter of exchanging the lesser for the better. God withholds nothing that is for our best good and calls on us to only sacrifice that which would hinder us in the path of joy. The very essence of sin is deception, promising us silk but conferring sackcloth, promising velvet but bestowing a shroud. The gospel exposes sin's pretensions and arms us against our enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Scripture is full of stories which mirror the Christian's joyous estate. There is Ruth, once excluded from the promised land and the chosen people, but who by the grace and love of Boaz, the lord of the harvest, finds rest, acceptance, and fruitfulness in his embrace. There is Benjamin, whose "mess" (food portion) exceeds that of all his brothers. There is the homicide fleeing the avenger who is pulled into safety in the city of refuge. There is the dove which can find no place for its foot till Noah takes hold of it gently and brings it into the ark. There is the Queen of Sheba who almost loses her breath at the sight of the splendors of Solomon's kingdom. There is Jehoiachin delivered from prison after thirty seven-years and placed as a king again at the royal banqueting table alongside the one who rescued him. There is Onesimus, the runaway slave who had robbed his master, but who ultimately was found by Christ through Paul, and who returned forgiven to his master to receive freedom. There is Lazarus seated at the table with Jesus after his resurrection from the dead. Christ had wept over him, but he bled over us, that we might be resurrected from the death of trespasses and sins. All those healed by Christ, the lepers, the blind, the deaf and dumb, the paralyzed, the demon possessed – all of them represent the Christian who has lost his leprosy of sin, his deafness to God's Word, his dumbness in speaking his Maker's praise, his paralysis in service through Satan's indwelling.

To know that God only sees us in Christ, that our righteousness is in heaven where it can never be lost provided we truly trust in him who became our substitute and surety, to have the confidence that we can never, never perish while trusting in his merits, that through the indwelling Holy Spirit we have God alongside to help in every situation, that we will never be tried above that which we are able, that all things work together for good to them that love God, that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord – this is heaven below.

Christ received is holiness begun, Christ cherished is holiness advancing, Christ counted upon as never absent – that would be holiness complete. By the look we were justified, by the gaze we are being sanctified. We have been redeemed from sin's guilt, we are being redeemed from its power, and one day soon at the Lord's return we shall be redeemed from sin's presence. The righteousness given by the merciful reckoning of God at our conversion is perfect though not inside us. The righteousness continually imparted by the Holy Spirit is inside us but is not perfect. The righteousness of glorification at the second advent will be both inside us and perfect. In the meantime, the law can no more condemn me than it can condemn Christ. While it provides a perfect standard, I do not look to it for a perfect standing.

To run and work the law commands, yet gives me neither feet nor hands,
But better news the gospel brings; it bids me fly and gives me wings.
I hear the words of love, I gaze upon the blood.
I see the mighty sacrifice, and I have peace with God.

It is these truths meditated upon continually that give joy, confidence, and strength. And all these truths find their incarnation and exemplification in the Calvary event. For "when Christ was crucified the law was magnified, justice was satisfied, sin was nullified, God glorified, sinners justified, and Satan petrified."

For all these reasons the Christian with Paul says: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ whereby the world was crucified unto me and I unto the world."

Through all the depths of sin and loss
Drops the plummet of thy cross
Never yet abyss was found
Deeper than that cross could sound.

Therefore let us sing!

O could I speak the matchless worth,
O could I sound the glories forth Which in my Saviour shine.

I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings
And vie with Gabriel while he sings,
In notes almost divine.

How shall we maintain our joy now that we have found it? How can we guarantee that the song shall not die away? The answer is simple: "As ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him" (Col 2:6). You received him by looking away from self and circumstances to the cross. You received him by trusting and obeying – in that order. As you looked to Calvary and listened to the gospel, God gave you faith, penitence, surrender, and obedience. He required nothing he did not provide. This was your first breath of the Christian life. Just keep on breathing, keep on looking, keep on receiving, keep on trusting, keep on obeying till time becomes eternity and faith becomes sight. Hallelujah!

A kaleidoscope focuses on beads and pieces of glass without value or significance in themselves but which, when combined aright, yield patterns, even visions, of splendor. How to do that with life (its flotsam and jetsam, its piercings and exhilarations, its mysteries and platitudes), and with God's great parabolic key of the cross, has been the theme of these volumes. If you have been helped, lend this literary kaleidoscope to a friend that you may add to your company throughout eternity.

The Gospel Alone

Soon the time will come
when Christ will be preached purely –
without any admixture of human traditions –
which is not now true.
O Gospel –
spring of the water
that springs forth unto eternal life –
when shall you reign in all your purity?
When shall Christ be all in all?
When will the only study,
the only comfort,
the only desire of all
be to know the Gospel –
and to spread it everywhere?
Then will all be persuaded as our ancestors were,
that to know nothing save the Gospel,
is to know everything.

From the Preface to Lefevre's Commentary on the Four Gospels, p. 1522