

CHRIST WILL BE ALL IN ALL

Chapter 7

THE CROSS AND THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

As we have progressed through the plan of God, and have seen the beauty of His holiness, the power of His sovereignty, and the wonders of His love, we must also realize that the crux of history, the power of conformity to His image, and the central truth of all ages is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His cross, and His rising, are both the sorrow and joy, the sad ending and bright new beginning, and the setting and rising sun of the hope of humanity. Truly, all things center in Jesus Christ. He is in the process of becoming everything to everyone, and at the culmination of the ages and the restitution of all things, He shall truly be All in all. We can speak of Him as “King of kings and Lord of lords” so casually at times, yet consider what glory He merits, that as the great kings that God is refining into His image are a great nation, Christ is King over those glorious kings. As these lords of His choosing are His special people, He is even Lord of these lords. And as the priests of God learn their role through much suffering, and through the working of the cross, Jesus Christ, as the only way to the Father, is the great High priest of our calling.

THE CROSS OF HIS SUFFERING

It is a hard heart that can approach the hill of Golgotha carelessly. The scene of man’s redemption is so fraught with both tragedy and triumph that it tears at our hearts with both deep sorrow and tremendous joy. The scene of Christ’s voluntary affliction, His knowing sacrifice, is so mysterious in its profundity, and awesome in its revelation of God and His nature of pure Love, that it is always overwhelming to look upon.

³ **He is despised and rejected by men,**

A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴ **Surely He has borne our griefs**

And carried our sorrows;

Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ **But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,**

***He was* bruised for our iniquities;**

The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,

And by His stripes we are healed.

⁶ **All we like sheep have gone astray;**

We have turned, every one, to his own way;

And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

**7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.(Isaiah 53:3-7)**

The Spirit, through Isaiah, reveals Christ as the slaughtered Passover lamb, the voluntary blood offering, and scapegoat of humanity. Despised, rejected, and well acquainted with sorrows, He is clearly shown to be the carrier of our burdens, and the sacrificial satisfaction of our transgressions.

But what happened at the cross exactly? Did God make Christ a sacrifice simply that He might “offer” something to a stiff necked people that would reject Him (aside from a elite few who had some spark of goodness that the hellbound multitudes did not)? - And how does this cross apply to our lives – what is it working in us, and for what purpose?

SALVATION IN THE LAMB

The first aspect of the cross that presents itself to any who come to it’s shadow, is the salvation that Christ has wrought by the offering up of Himself, and the mighty power of atonement that is in His precious blood. One of the most famous passages in scripture addresses the hope of salvation that is found in His sacrifice, and states God’s sovereign purpose in sending forth His Son to such a destiny:

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.^[a] 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but^[b] have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:13-17)

The purpose of the cross is clearly defined as salvation of the world - not condemnation. This salvation is brought about because God so loved the world, *even as we were all dead in trespasses and sins*, as mentioned in the last chapter. We see, as in the passage from Isaiah, the obvious hopelessness of man’s condition, and reality that there was NO “spark of goodness” in ANY of us that would or could respond to God without Him sovereignly quickening us by His Holy Spirit and revealing His Son Jesus Christ to us. Paul, quoting various scriptures, confirms the totality of man’s bondage and rebellion in his letter to the Romans:

9 What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

10 As it is written:

“ There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
¹² They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.*^[b]
¹³ *“ Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;*^[c]

“ The poison of asps is under their lips”;^[d]
¹⁴ *“ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”*^[e]
¹⁵ *“ Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways;
¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known.”*^[f]
¹⁸ *“ There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:9-18)*

What a picture of hopelessness and despair! How could we ever believe that there was anything in man that could “choose God”, or any circumstances by which we might find salvation, save the love, wisdom, and all powerful drawing of God Himself! The Word is so clear that we were all dead, and that any hope or power of salvation was to be found in the loving will and divine wisdom of God alone. For indeed, the Spirit clearly states through John in the opening of his gospel:

¹² **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)**

A totally sovereign salvation! Born of God – not of our own will, the will of man. The Spirit again underlines the source of salvation to be in God alone, by His Son, and the lack of our participation in our spiritual birth is clearly emphasized. Our redemption, sanctification, and ongoing growth is all by the divine hand, working alone, as a potter shapes his clay. We are truly His workmanship, and we hear the Spirit speak this truth again through the second chapter of Ephesians. The Amplified version of the Bible brings this awesome reality out beautifully:

¹⁰**For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship), ^[d]recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live]. (Ephesians 2:10)**

It brings comfort and peace to know that we are God's own handiwork, that we are taking paths that He has prepared ahead of time, and that He has made us a life to live, that we cannot fail but walk in. To perceive the great guiding hand of God on our lives, and recognize it as weaving the very fabric of history itself, is a reassurance that can bring rest to our souls as we meditate upon His works. In the words of the Psalmist:

**16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them. (Psalm 139:16)**

Knowing salvation to be completely of God, and the cross entirely of His wise purpose and foresight, we can give glory to His name and rejoice in the certainty of His complete triumph when we hear the Only Begotten, Jesus Christ, declare:

32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” (John 12:32)

We can also better understand how far the redemption of the cross reaches, and how fully and utterly God’s justice has been satisfied by the blood of the spotless lamb, when we discern the universal, cosmic reconciliation that has been brought about by this great centerpiece of God’s plan of the ages:

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

For the blood of Christ is indeed powerful to save, to reconcile, and to restore! The cross of His suffering was decreed and agreed before the very foundation of the world, in the perfection of God’s Holy will, and the immutability of His wisdom. This was a cross that would make peace! This was a cross that would reconcile all things to God! Holy, holy, holy, is the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ, and blessed be that name forever!

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Brethren, one of the most profound truths of our faith in Christ that is dangerously ignored and even contradicted by many who claim to preach the gospel, is the truth of our *sharing in His suffering*. Suffering, in this “health and wealth” day and age, has grown to be seen increasingly as a sign of cursing rather than blessing, and a state of being to be avoided, rather than accepted and embraced. There is a lack of clarity in the church, and in many dear saints, as to why God still brings such severe fire to our lives, if it be that He truly loves us, and as a result of this uncertainty the faith of many is undermined. Saints of God, I solemnly declare to you that *suffer we must* – not as sinners, but in fellowship with our Lord - nor as reprobates, but as those whom in Spirit of Christ has placed at enmity with the spirit of the world. And though the suffering is real, with terrible pain at times, He always gives us seasons of respite, and the suffering itself is indeed an *honor!*

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you,

for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.^[d] On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

Peter, by the Spirit, makes it abundantly clear that our trials are to be cause of rejoicing. They are actually the refining hand of God, heating up the furnace of our lives, that He may mold us carefully into the image of His Son. Hear also what the Spirit says through Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi:

²⁹ For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29)

To us it has been *granted!* This statement shows that not only is our belief in Christ given by God, showing His sovereignty in salvation, but that our very fellowship in His sufferings is also a gift, an honor, and a privilege bestowed upon us by God. I need hardly tell you how little this is preached! Furthermore, we know that as we go through the furnace of our afflictions, He is with us always, in the midst of the flames, even as He was with His three Hebrew sons who would not bow the knee to a false god:

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?”

They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

²⁵ “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” (Daniel 3:24-25)

What a wonderful picture God paints of His faithfulness and His fidelity when we consider that scene in Babylon! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were saved *through* the fire of affliction – *not from it!* It is a constant temptation to the disciple to avoid the way of cross, to look this way and that, in the hope of finding “another way”, by which we might make our entrance into the promised blessings ahead. But it is not so – whether on the grand scale of our lives, or in the day to day circumstances, we must have faces set like flint to suffer gladly and gratefully for the glory of our dear Lord:

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39)

Our lives, and the spirit realm that we inhabit, are very real battlegrounds, and our eyes must be full of the light of Christ’s own glory, and a consciousness of His utter triumph if we are to live out that wonderful victory in a manner befitting the saints of the

Most High, and disciples of the Lamb. Our attitude toward our trials must be the same as our Lord's and we must gain a deep spiritual comprehension of the blessedness of our Father's discipline. As Paul wrote to Timothy by the Spirit:

³ You therefore must endure^[a] hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:3)

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12)

We must have this same soldier mentality when it comes to our trials, remembering the great captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is this very suffering that prepares us to be glorified together with Him:

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17)

Let us view our lives and our sufferings from the eternal perspective of God, that we may understand the incredible disparity between our trials in this life and our wonderful inheritance in Christ:

¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17)

These trials, these purgings, and these refinements, are but a *light affliction* when compared to the weight of glory to come! What joy the Spirit ministers to our hearts when we contemplate this! Let us suffer gladly for such a God, who in His benevolence is disciplining us in the ways of His Kingdom, and chastising us to conformity to the image of His Son:

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

***“ My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;***

***⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives. ”^[a]***

⁷ If^[b] you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they

indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:3-11)

He chastises us for our profit, that we might be “partakers of His holiness”! The cross in our lives, though heavy and extremely painful, yields fruit in all who are trained by it. The passage also exhorts us to “readily be in subjection” to our Father. Not begrudgingly, or with mutterings and complaining, but in complete agreement with His perfect will - for we share in such a marvellous inheritance, and are following in the footsteps of such a great Savior. Let us readily accept the same cup from our Father, confessing that we are willing to be processed in the same manner:

¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Hebrews 2:10-11)

Amen! Let it be so with us!

THE CROSS IN THE GOSPEL

Jesus Christ, and His cross and resurrection, are the centerpiece of the Kingdom, and the Gospel of that Kingdom. A sure mark of apostasy and deception is when a “gospel” is preached that has whitewashed those elements from the message. Hence, such fables as “health and wealth”, “name it and claim it”, and “have faith in faith”, arise. Man centered, fleshy, and carnal doctrines to tickle the ears of the spiritually deaf. Brethren, I would earnestly beseech you to walk warily, being as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves, for there are many wolves among us, who have exchanged the glory of God for a lie, and are piping a tune to lead even the elect astray, were it possible. Whole sermons are preached without mention of the cross, whole sessions of praise and worship take place without the name of Jesus Christ even being mentioned! Let it not be so with us! For it was Paul, by the Spirit, who said:

¹ And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony^[a] of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

Paul had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a renowned teacher of Israel, and was extremely educated in the wisdom of the flesh. Yet he clung to the message of the cross as the banner of salvation, and extolled the Lord Jesus Christ ceaselessly, for he knew that all the wisdom and knowledge of this world was as dung compared to the Lord and His glory. In his epistle to the Galatian saints, Paul, by the Spirit, emphasizes the sufficiency of the cross as his gospel, declares his own fellowship with Christ and His cross, and exposes the apostate desire in some to do away with the cross and its suffering:

¹² As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom^[a] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but *a new creation.*

¹⁶ And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁸ Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.
(Galatians 6:12-18)

Indeed, Paul saw the very evidence of his qualification to minister by the things he had suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ and His gospel!

²² Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ *in* weariness and toil, *in* sleeplessness often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness— ²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. (2 Corinthians 11:22-30)

In an age where Christian writers and theologians list their credentials as their degrees, certifications, and ministry results, usually next to a big glossy photograph of themselves on the flap of whatever publication they are peddling, it is almost alien to hear the Spirit speaking through Paul regarding the qualification of suffering! Paul indeed understood the purpose behind our tribulations in this life and recognized the true sign of God's approval, boasting in these things, rather than the vain achievements of the flesh, which are driven by worldly ambition and often at odds with the humility of Christ. The Spirit issues a wonderful proclamation through him to the church at Galatia:

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

This beautiful passage is a declaration that should be inscribed upon the heart of every disciple of our Lord. *I have been crucified with Christ...* we have been redeemed by the cross and the blood of the lamb, and understand how completely our sin was laid upon Him and how we died with Him. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...* we do not belong to ourselves, having died. We are legally vessels of the Lord, and instruments of His Spirit, as His life proceeds forth from Him and enters this realm through His saints. *The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...* our walk is a walk of faith – and not a faith in anything else but Christ Himself. Our comprehension of our sin being judged on the cross and our subsequent innocence before God, our belief in His ongoing benevolence, and our hope of entering into our full inheritance in Him all come by faith, which, lest any man should boast, we must again state to be a gift of God. *Who loved me and gave Himself for me...* the reality of the Love of God, and the confession of the heart and character behind the cross, must ever permeate our spiritual vision.

We must always take heed, lest we ever allow the cross to be removed from the Gospel we preach. On the surface it would seem to be impossible for such a transcending truth to be discarded and left by the wayside, but it is precisely this centrality and eternal relevance that causes such an all out attack from the powers and principalities of wickedness.

CONCLUSION

Truly there is salvation in the cross, and in the blood of the Holy Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly we can gaze up at His sacrifice in hope, as the revelation of His great atonement is unfolded to our hearts yet more and more. Truly we must cry “Amen!” when the finger of God points us to the way of suffering, and when the hand of the Lord gives us His cup of sorrows to drink from. For we are His – bought and redeemed at such a price, dead on the cross with Him, and dead to our old nature, and the transgressions that held us captive – yea, dead to Death itself. For the cross is the power of God to save, cleanse, and reconcile, and that great sacrifice of our mighty King stands out from the panorama of history as the moment of truth, the moment of triumph, and the foundation of our hope, brought into sharp focus and joyous fulfillment three days and three nights later, when Jesus rose again...

