

The Cross of Christ – Part 1

This poster looks familiar to you, doesn't it? It's an attempt to take in a simple algebraic way and capture the essence of all the spade work that's required to bring us to the foot of the cross to receive the fullness of revelation about the cross. This is the foundation. We began where God told us to begin, in the beginning God. What human effort is ever spoken with such clarity as that—to tell us exactly where to begin in the first four words of the Bible. So we began with God and out of that looked at the beauty of His creative effort and that began to awaken within us an awareness of the Holiness of God; that is to say the absolute “other thanness” of God. Remember, not slightly different; not different by some degree, but just other than anything else in all of existence. That then quickened within us the revelation of the fear of the Lord; that is to walk in awe and reverence of this “other than” God of Genesis 1:1. The reason is, we're going to walk in one of two things—either awe and reverence of the God in Genesis 1:1 or awe and reverence of ourselves and our ability to pronounce what God is, if He is, and what He must be. So when we walk in the fear of the Lord, that's when we begin to throw out our old definition of truth and begin to walk in the light of what truth really is; because truth is what God is and how that God views everything else. Truth is not what I can determine through the analysis of my natural mind. When we begin to walk in the light of what truth is, then we begin to understand the sin of man; because as long as we're judging what sin is, by our natural minds and our analytical selves, we will always underestimate the magnitude of sin in our lives and we will have no revelation of the absolute abomination that sin is before a Holy God.

So we took our understanding of sin, remember, to its root which is that drive in the human heart to judge God; to judge if God is right or if what I decide through some choice presumed in my natural mind is right. And our judging of God is based on that drive to be self determined to the point of autonomy which means free from any external control including free from God. I heard a testimony recently, a question from a person who is unsaved who said, “I just want to be convinced in my mind that what the Bible has said is true.” Well the problem with that is that the natural mind is judging when God has given enough evidence to reveal Himself, which is simply to continue judging God; because based on how God views reality, God says if you simply look at what has been made, you're without excuse before me because I reveal Myself so clearly to the human race that every man is without excuse before Me. So any man who says “if God would just reveal Himself so I would then know and be convinced” is still in a heart position of pride, self determination, and judging that he can judge when God has presented enough evidence to declare Himself.

Well that set the stage for our understanding of His judgment of us; and that allowed us, remember, to understand Hell, to understand its reality, to understand its horror, and then to get the unexpected revelation of the beauty of Hell and how it reveals in an unmistakable way the absolute hatred of God for any departure from His character, His will, His purposes, and His plan. That revealing His absolute love and passion to remain one with His character, His will His purposes and His plan. So if God didn't hate every departure that much, He couldn't be said to love everything that is consistent with His

character and plan that much. So that hatred of sin is the revelation of His love of righteousness. Well if He didn't hate unrighteousness to that degree, how could He be counted upon to be faithful and true—that being the beauty of Hell. Because Hell, itself, is one of our greatest revelations right along with creation and cross about the absolute essential characteristics of God as the sovereign majestic creator King, as the passionate lover, and as the fierce but righteous judge.

Then, of course, we looked at Heaven including the fullness of its contrast with Hell. And only then when we see what Hell is in its horror, and what Heaven is in its bliss and understand that we deserve that and get that, only then do we begin to be awakened to the grace of God. Not just grace, but amazing grace, and not just amazing grace, but holy grace, an “other than” kind of grace, beyond anything that we could ask, or think, or comprehend. And then when you do that, you come to where we are now. That is to the how and why of Heaven and not Hell; because that brings us to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

This is a rough outline of what I'll follow today. See I think if we don't prepare our hearts to receive revelation, what we will do is miss part of the revelation available to us. So let's prepare to land at the foot of the cross and that's what we'll talk about today. The first thing to know is - this is holy ground. And remember the primary meaning of holy is “other than”. So the cross of Christ is an “other than” kind of subject. We don't want to walk in nonchalantly and just kind of accept whatever comes our way. We want to come with hunger and thirst so that we receive all the fullness of revelation that we can about the cross of Christ. Remember, when we approach something that is holy, we're to be sober minded; remember - that has several dimensions. Be alert, to be clear minded, to have a passion for the truth based on how God views reality and to have a seriousness of mood that matches the seriousness of the subject. There is a place for humor in Christianity; but there's not a place for humor that displaces revelation of God and His Holiness. So we need to prepare our hearts by regarding it as holy in order to maximize our benefit as the Word of God is spoken to us, because it's at the cross that we ultimately draw nearer to God.

James 4:8 (we know well) – “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” Now understand that all Scripture usually has more than one meaning, one dimension of meaning plus another dimension of meaning. This doesn't mean that God is not omnipresent because He is always everywhere in His omnipresent theologic sense; but it means when He draws near to you, He reveals Himself to you. You have this perception of His presence. You know intuitively the reality of His presence rather than some theologic abstraction based on His omnipresence. But we're to draw near to Him.

So how are we going to do that? Leviticus 10:3 tells us even harkening back to the Old Testament – “By those who come near to Me, I will be regarded as Holy.” So the primary determinate of our drawing near to God is to regard Him as Holy; because the truth is He is Holy. So if we're going to worship Him in truth, we can only worship Him regarding Him as Holy; because the truth is He is Holy. So if we do not regard Him as Holy, including the subject specifically of the cross of His Son, then we are not drawing

near to Him; and thus, He will not draw near to us. So we diminish our revelations from God if we choose to remain distant from God by not regarding Him as Holy.

Exodus 3:5 (remember, He spoke to Moses) – “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you’re standing is holy ground.” So in a symbolic sense, we are to remove the sandals from our feet as we presume to come to the foot of the cross of Christ because this is holy ground. John 4:24 – “God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.” So how are we to do this? Later if we persevere to go into the Kingdom of God, we know the subjects of flesh and spirit; so today for the purpose of what I’m saying, I want you only to look at the first two lines. Because according to the New Testament, we’re going to have our minds set on either the flesh or on the spirit at all times. Now the basis of the flesh is self. The basis of the spirit is God. According to Hebrews 1:2 – “In these last days, God has spoken to us in His Son; this is My beloved Son, listen to Him.” So, therefore, for us as Christians in the New Testament sense, the basis for us (for everything) is Jesus Christ. That’s why Paul could say “I laid the foundation; there is no other foundation than Jesus Christ, Him crucified.”

In the flesh with self as the basis, truth is what I say that it is. I will determine when God has given enough evidence to prove that He exists. That’s flesh. In the spirit with God as the basis, truth is what God says about everything. Thus, if I’m going to worship God in spirit and in truth I do this by regarding God as the basis and for us specifically, His Son as the foundation of all, and truth being what God says, how He views reality.

So the sandals that we can take off to stand on the holy ground at the foot of the cross of Christ can be thought of as symbolic. The sandals represent our walk upon planet Earth in the flesh with self as the basis and with truth being what I say that it is. To take those sandals off is to set the mind on the spirit with Jesus Christ as the basis and truth being what He says that it is. When you do that, you are worshipping Him in spirit and in truth. That’s to draw near to Him by regarding Him as holy; because if you’re not regarding Him as the foundation, you are not regarding Him as holy. If you’re not regarding truth as what He says that it is, you are not regarding Him as holy. But when you’re doing those two things, you’re en route to regarding Him as holy. That is to draw near to God and then that God draws near to you by revealing progressive revelation of His Son including the magnitude of the cross of Christ and its amazing grace beyond anything that you ever knew before.

Now all that simply means is that we walk in humility before our Holy God by agreeing that we do not come to God to judge His truth. We come to God to receive His truth and then to have that truth judge us. That’s why Jesus could say, I don’t judge you; you are judged by the words that I speak because I’m speaking how God views reality. That’s what worship is; and if you don’t come to the foot of the cross with attitudes like that, then what we’re doing is operating in presumption, choosing to remaining in the flesh, functioning in self determination, not regarding Him as holy, while continuing to walk in our self worship.

Now why should we regard this as holy ground? Well, it's the mother lode of all spiritual revelation. It's the most important event in the history of existence. It's the event that all preceding events pointed toward. It's the event that all subsequent events look back to and are interpreted in the light of. It's the event that determines the eternal destiny of every human being. If we don't regard that event as holy, then what event will we ever regard as holy? So that's not something that we want to miss; we don't want to miss it in its entirety and we don't want to miss any part of it, of what God has for us. Well, how could we miss it? By having a limitation of expectation. You see, if you come to this noon meeting and you have an expectation you're going to just hear some well worn truths somewhat refurbished or dusted off, then you're placing a limitation of expectation; not because it's me, but because the Word of God being spoken.

So when you put a pre-established filter up that you're not likely to hear anything new, that you're not likely to walk out of here with a greater blessing, that you're not likely to walk out of here with more explosive power in your spiritual life, you have put a filter of self determination; and thus, limited the blessing that's available to you. Has nothing to do with me; it has everything to do with the Word of God and your attitude toward it. So when you come with hunger and thirst to receive the greater blessing, you're now functioning in the spirit and in truth, seeking the face of God, humbling yourself before Him, regard Him as holy, worshipping Him and not yourself, not self determining how much revelation can come; but presuming that when you're dealing with an omniscient God, there is always more revelation to come. That's to get rid of a limitation of expectation.

The children of Israel modeled for us the limitation of expectation. They effectively said yes we believe in the Messiah; but then He walked among them and they didn't recognize Him. Why? Because they said He will come, but He won't come in my lifetime and He certainly won't come in this way. So they missed Him. And you can have a limitation of expectation from several mechanisms. One is not knowing the Scripture; the other is knowing but not believing the Scripture. But for us, it is knowing and believing the Scriptures but then self determining how they must be fulfilled; and self determining where the blessing is likely to come from, you see. Because God will always speak to you through an imperfect messenger; so if you come in here because I'm fairly young in the Lord and I don't have the in-depth theologic sense of the people out of seminaries, then what you're doing is self determining that the blessing can't come through me which is to negate the blessing that God has for you through me. Because He will always speak to you through imperfect people because that's the only kind that He has.

The second way you miss it is by thinking that you know. I Corinthians 8:2 – "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know." So do you think that you know; do you think that you know what is to be known about the cross of Christ? Well, then you do not know as you ought to know. So let us know that we do know some things, but also let us never think that we know fully anything that pertains to a Holy God; because the instant that you think you know is when you close your mind to all greater revelation and that's the instant that you cease to receive further revelation. So we're to have the attitude that Moses represented. Remember Moses was the most

humble man on Earth? Well what was his attitude? Deuteronomy 3:24 – “Oh Lord God, Thou has begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy strong hand.” God had led them out of the captivity of Egypt. He had presented all the miracles before Pharaoh; He had parted the Red Sea, He had used the Red Sea to swallow up the Egyptian army, He had given manna from Heaven, He had given water out of a rock; and Moses after experiencing all that plus more says you have begun to show me Thy greatness and Thy strong hand. That’s humility, see, and that’s the expectant heart that comes into any place that the Word of God is being spoken. It has nothing to do with me.

Foreknown, foretold, for faith – John Piper fans will recognize the phraseology. He uses that in regard to prophecies. You see the one who knows the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, will faith much at their fulfillment. The Old Testament, remember, wasn’t written because God was bored. The Old Testament was written, including its prophecies, for us in order to reveal God’s power, God’s sovereignty, God’s faithfulness, and God’s control of all, and God’s involvement with us in every detail of life. So seeing prophecy fulfilled increases our faith about prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled. So we don’t want to (through self determination and limitation of expectation) to belittle any source of God given power for our faith as we approach the cross of Christ. That’s why He says “live by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” He told us that in Matthew 4:4. Because the instant we start thinking that there are some words that will have power for me and some words that I don’t need, what we’re doing is self determining what part of God we don’t need, which is just to judge that part of God as being inadequate to meet your needs.

So look at the past and how it pointed to this event. Let’s look at some Old Testament prophecies. Because we only have two choices: One is to embrace them as meaningful to us and the other is to despise them because what you choose not to embrace, you are choosing to despise. And I Thessalonians 5:20 says – “do not despise prophetic utterances.” Amos 3:7 – “God does nothing unless He proclaims it through His prophets.” Well did He do something at the cross? Well I think He did. Then He would have proclaimed it through His prophets. Over 700 years before the cross, we know that Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign.” So you can’t miss it. “In the beginning God” — so you can’t miss where to begin. He will give you a sign; “behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call His name Emanuel which means God is with us.” That prophecy was fulfilled, of course, in Matthew 1:20-23 when the virgin birth of Jesus occurred. It’s also fulfilled and explained in John 1: verse 1 and verse 14 as it states that “the Word was with God and the Word was God and that Word became flesh and dwelled among us.” So we don’t serve some theologic abstraction. We serve a God Who is so intimately involved that He condescended to come to Earth in the form of a man and not just to come, but to give Himself for us as we will explore. In Isaiah chapter 53, God proclaimed through his prophet the future Messiah and His substitutionary death on the cross for mankind. Then Jesus Himself, the One we call Savior in Luke 22:37 says – “For I tell you that this is which is written must be fulfilled in Me.” That’s because it was written about Jesus and so it must be fulfilled in Jesus and can’t be fulfilled in anyone else. And then He quoted from Isaiah 53 when He said – “And He was numbered with the transgressors” and then

He went on to say "For that which refers to Me has its fulfillment in Me." Of course, and He was numbered with the transgressors, prophetically spoken – in Isaiah chapter 53, 700 years before as Jesus was crucified then between two thieves. In Luke 16:31 – Jesus said “if they did not believe Moses and the prophets, then they will not believe though someone rise from the dead.” Likewise your revelation of the cross and your faith in the cross will be in part limited through your self determination if you do not seek to know and then live in the increasing faith of seeing the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and His substitutionary death then fulfilled for us.

So we don't want to let go of any God given source of power for our faith about the cross and seeing the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled cannot help but cause explosive growth in your faith. We've all heard the cute little phrases that are there and repeated because they make a point. The new is in the old contained and the old is in the new explained. The new is in the old concealed and the old is in the new revealed. So the Old Testament prophecies were foreknown, foretold, for faith, including to increase our faith about the cross of Jesus Christ.

The next one is like Father, like Son. We want to remind ourselves about the New Testament Jesus in comparison with the Old Testament God. Because sometimes I think in the heart of Christians, there is the tendency to view our loving, cuddly Jesus in one light and in higher esteem than we tend do the Old Testament wrathful judgmental God. We need to avoid that mistake because if we don't pay attention to Scripture before we approach the cross, we will begin in error and then interpret in error about that point. We all know the Scripture John 3:16 – “for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.” Can you imagine the Father God giving His Son to undergo the horror of the cross, not only through knowing the horror of Hell, and not suffering with Him? That is not a blasé act; that is an act done only by someone Who loves us that much. Jesus then said other things about the Father. John 14:26 – “The Holy Spirit Whom the Father will send.” John 14:28 – “The Father is greater than I.” John 16:27 – “The Father Himself loves you.” John 17:3 – “This is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God.” And John 17:18 – “As Thou doest send Me into the world, so send I them.” John 17:22 – “The Father and I are One.” And that allows us to understand John 14:9 – “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”

So we don't need to use our self determination to conceive of a loving Jesus and a wrathful Father. To keep those distinctions when the two are one is a violation of the Trinity of God and a violation of the Word of God. Because as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4-6 – “They are one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all.” So we have to understand and accept the unity of the Trinity rather than using our natural minds to try to cleave the Trinity and view one part of the Trinity as loving and the other part of the Trinity as wrathful and judgmental. Matthew 20:28 – “Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many.” Well it's evident from that one verse, that Jesus must love us and have grace for us to pay his life as a ransom for us. But of course, remember, Psalm 119:160 – “The sum of Thy Word is truth.” So what does the sum of the word say? The sum of the word says it took the love and grace of the Father to send Jesus to do that. It

took the love and grace of the Father to forsake His Son on the cross in order for Jesus to fulfill the redemptive plan of the Father. So you can distinguish, but not separate the love and grace of Jesus from the love and grace of the Father—like Father, like Son.

Then the Lamb of God - Jesus as the Lamb of God was, of course, foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The law as given was supreme. A blood sacrifice was required to atone for the sins of the people; but not just any old blood sacrifice. Leviticus 1:1-4 (as well as other places) – states that the lamb must be unblemished, spotless without defect. In other words, it had to be a creature perfect enough to be presented to a Holy God as symbolic of a perfect sacrifice which was to come. So the lamb, of course, was not perfect; but it had to be viewed as a symbol which was perfect enough to accurately reflect what was yet to occur. So prophetic of the true Lamb of God to come in the New Testament. But the New Testament Lamb was a person, not an animal; not just any person, but the Son of God; not just a symbol, but a reality; and not just perfect enough, but actually perfect. For the crucifixion would be meaningless except for the fact that the sacrifice offered met certain criteria. It must be voluntary. Can you imagine a sacrifice being considered adequate to pay for the sins of the world if Jesus was forced to go to the cross, kicking and screaming? It had to be perfect and in spite of temptation. There was a first Adam who was tempted and a second Adam to be tempted. The first Adam submitted to the temptation; the second Adam did not and said Thy will be done. And, of course, it must be acceptable to the Father. Matthew 26:53 – (speaking of the voluntary) Jesus says “do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” In other words, “I’m here of My own will; I’m not here because the Father made Me come; the Father gave Me, the Father sent Me; but the Father did not make Me come.” In John 10:18 – “No one takes My life but I lay it down.” So He was nailed to the cross—not because someone took His life; but because He laid it down.

How about perfect? I Peter 1:18-19 – “You were redeemed with precious blood as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Jesus Christ in spite of temptation.” Hebrews 4:15-16 – “For we have a high priest Who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin, acceptable to God the Father.” Well, of course, all of Scripture thereafter tells us that it was acceptable to the Father; but we can look at corresponding events either at the crucifixion or after the crucifixion. We know of the darkness coming at mid-day; we know of the earthquakes, we know of the resurrection of some already dead; we know of the rent in the veil into the Holy of Holies; we know of the resurrection of Christ; the ascension of Christ; the giving of the Holy Spirit to us to bear witness of Christ; and because the Father repeatedly said along the way in Scripture, this is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. So this was the Lamb of God, voluntary, perfect (though tempted), and an acceptable sacrifice to the Father. So why do I go through all this? Because we are preparing to land at the foot of the cross of Christ and we don’t want to come in nonchalantly; we want to come in with prepared minds and submitted hearts regarding Him as Holy, expecting a blessing of the greater revelation so that we walk away ready to bear witness for the rest of our time on planet Earth about exactly what took place at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Well, my time is up for today and I thank you for listening.