

The Cross of Christ – Part 3

Remember, we went through holiness; we went through sin; we went through judgment, not as ends in themselves, but to prepare us to come to land on the holy ground of the cross. We looked in the first session at how we could miss it, by having a limitation of expectation or as long standing Christians by thinking that we know. We looked at Old Testament prophecies foreknown, foretold, for faith. We looked at like Father, like Son so that we didn't fall into the trap of viewing the Father as Old Testament wrath and the Son as New Testament cuddly love; but to see that the Father and Son are One. We looked at Jesus as the Lamb of God, Who went to the cross voluntarily after living a perfect life although tempted in all ways such as we are to become a sacrifice acceptable to the Father to be the propitiation for our sins that is to appease the wrath of God on our behalf.

Then we looked at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the God-man in the garden. As Jesus cried out to the Father, "may this cup pass from me." There was nothing in the human nature of Jesus that would want to hang on a cross. We looked at Jesus as man, Jesus as God, the travail of the God-man, taking that that flowed from the human nature, "may this cup pass from me"; but the submission of that as the Son of God to accomplish the will of the Father. Jesus was a God-man; because the message for us as New Testament Christians is we're not mere men. Paul wrote that—"you're acting like mere men; walking as mere men; but you are not mere men. Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God?" That knowledge begins to empower us to walk as He walked; because if we don't understand that and we walk as New Testament Christians as mere men, we will always fail and always yield to the lusts of the flesh. Then we reminded ourselves of Jesus as the Son of God; not just a more moral man, not just a wiser man, not just a good teacher; but the image of God, the fullness of Deity, the glory of God, the nature of God, the God-man, the Son of God, the message of God, the word of God, the likeness of God, and in fact, the One God.

Now that gets us to the point today where we begin to look at the travail of the cross. We're going to begin today by looking at what I call "sweet suffering"; because when you suffer to accomplish the will of the Father, there's a sweetness to it. And that's the title that I picked. Now most of us in our human nature tend to lose our psychologic edge when we get a paper cut. Some trivial affliction in life can divert our attention from the will of God. But how did Jesus do this? How did He cope with the horror of the cross, even the physical suffering? We're going to begin by looking at the physical, but His suffering is not limited to the physical.

Next poster. Now there are certain ways that I have selected to present that Jesus applied in order to endure the horror of the cross. The first is as a lifestyle, not an event; because if we do the battle as an event, we will default to the flesh through major segments of our time on Earth. But the battle, in fact, is to be viewed as a lifestyle. That's why Scripture says "capture every thought to the obedience to Christ." Because we capture an occasional thought in a moment of conflict and pat ourselves on the back as being godly, not knowing that there are always two thoughts in eternal conflict at every moment. The

thoughts of God or our own thoughts; or something opposed to the thoughts of God. So Jesus died as a lifestyle, not an event. He didn't wait until He got to the cross in order to do the will of the Father; to do only what He saw the Father do. His preparation, if you'll remember began as the first act after being baptized by John the Baptist. He was sent into the wilderness to fast and to be tempted by Satan. The point I'm making about that is this. If we wait until the test to decide what to do in the test, then we will fail the test. We know that and we teach our young people that very principle, but as adults, we tend to give ourselves a "bye" in that regard. That is to say what parent has not told his teenager that "if you do not decide before you go out on the date not to have sex, you will eventually have sex?" The decision has to be made; the death to the lust of the flesh has to be made before the test is even presented in order to pass the test. So if you wait until the test to decide what to do in the test, you're very likely to fail the test.

Jesus passed the test to the cross because He, by choice, had already died to every choice except to do the will of the Father. He died to self interest even when first tempted by Satan in the wilderness because Satan kept offering Him things to reward Him with things that would fulfill the lusts of the flesh in this world. And each time you'll recall that Jesus answered with the Words of God; with the thoughts of God, drawn from the sum of the truth of God. He had already chosen to live as the Son of man, not by natural events; but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. So when Satan tried to mislead Him by selectively picking one part of the Word of God in order to bring Him away from fulfilling the will of God, Jesus could answer with the rest of the Word to complement the first word that Satan had presented in order to steadfastly do only what He saw the Father do. He worshipped the Father in Spirit and in truth, not in circumstances. He was able to die the way that He did because He had lived the way that He did. As a lifestyle, He set His mind on the things of the Spirit, rather than setting the mind on the things of the flesh. He understood that His cross, which He kept speaking would occur, was to be viewed as a lifestyle, not an event, and likewise our battle on Earth as New Testament Christians is a lifestyle, not an event.

The next is vision. Now here, as is common in Scripture, we have to balance two viewpoints. Just as when Satan tempted Jesus, he gave one viewpoint from the Word of God; but then Jesus would give the other viewpoint from the Word of God. Matthew 6:34 (in the King James Version) – "take therefore no thought for the morrow for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Well balance that with Proverbs 29:18 (in the King James Version) – "where there is no vision, the people perish." Well a vision is some view of the future; so we're taught to have no thought for the future, but without a view of the future, we perish. Because see, obstacles are what we see when we take our eyes off the target. So when we get our attention as New Testament Christians, diverted from the target, we will see only obstacles that will appear too big for us. But Jesus could see the target. He had a vision; His vision was the redemption of mankind by doing the will of the Father and He was sustained by that vision. Compared to His eternal purpose, He regarded all suffering in the manner that Paul regarded when he wrote II Corinthians 4:17 – "for momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

So when you would compare the pleasures of the flesh with the eternal pleasures of fulfilling the will of God, there is no comparison. You remember, before I got saved I used to argue about Christians being the most masochistic people I'd ever seen on planet Earth; couldn't understand why they put themselves through misery like that. Well then as a New Testament Christian, after I was born again, I got the little revelation which helped unravel that for me; that masochism is the willful seeking of pain because of feeling unworthy of pleasure. But the crucifixion, the crucified life of the Christian is not that at all. The crucified life of a Christian, taking up our cross, is the willful acceptance of pain out of devotion to a greater pleasure—the glory of God, fulfilling the purposes of God, living out the plan of God while reflecting the character of God, you see. Because in that presence is fullness of joy and at Thy right hand are pleasures forever. And when your eye is fixed on that vision, then the momentary light affliction of the pain of the flesh is dwarfed into insignificance. And Jesus was living that way as a crucified life; “no one takes my life but I lay it down”, you see. Not for no pleasure, not to endure pain for no goal, but to fulfill the vision and receive the pleasure of the fulfillment of that vision.

Likewise we're to take no thought for the morrow if you mean worry - that subtracts energy today. But we live today, moment by moment, in the precious present. That's the only moment that we can worship our God. We cannot worship God in the past; we cannot worship God in the future; we can only worship God right here and right now. So if we're not in the here and not in the now, we cannot worship God. But we live today moment by moment in the precious present worshiping our God in the light of our vision which is our sustaining view of all eternity. Now even the world knows this; for in the book Seven Habits of Highly Successful People, one of the habits is “to begin with the end in mind.” You see, if you don't know where you are going, it never really matters where you are and never really matters what direction you are heading. So Jesus began and lived to the cross with the end in mind. (Question to Buddy: Would you say that again.) If you don't know where you're going, it never matters where you are and never matters which direction you're heading. The only antidote for a life like that - blown by the wind is a vision, and that's what Scripture means, “without a vision the people perish.”

The next one is single-mindedness. James 1:8 – “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” So was Jesus stable on the cross? I think He was. He had no double mindedness. You see, He never for a moment had to waver between two choices and then to make a choice based on the circumstances. His resolve was already to choose the Father's will rather than “un-god”, whatever the circumstance. He made each choice by having already made each choice. Because remember, every choice is the same choice - God or “un-god”. Truth being what *God* says or truth being what *I* say in contrast to what God said?

Next is zeal; the lack of zeal is part of the reason that we're double minded and, in fact, the *revelation* that we're double minded. Recall when Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple. The next verse, John 2:17 – his disciples remembered that it was written, “zeal for Thy house will consume me.” So it wasn't hatred of the

moneychangers, it was zeal for the preservation of the integrity of the house of His Father that consumed Him. That's in Psalm 69:9. (Question to Buddy: "When you say zeal will consume you, are you looking at that as a good thing or bad thing right there?") It's a great thing as we'll see here. Recall the zeal of Jesus at age 12 when He stayed behind after His parents' caravan had been gone for two days. Luke 2:49 (King James Version) He said to his parents, "do you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" I must be about it. It's a life call. Everything else dwarfs into its insignificance compared to being about My Father's business. That's the zeal; that's a good thing.

So here again we're to balance two frames of reference. We do have the peace that surpasses understanding – Philippians 4:7. We are to be content whatever the circumstance – Philippians 4:11. We are to enter the rest of God – Hebrews 4:9. But it's also true that we are to zealously hunger and thirst. So peace, rest, and contentment do not exclude zeal, hunger and thirst. In other words, peace, rest, and contentment is not to equal apathy. We're wholly satisfied with the Holy One; but we have a constant wholly dissatisfaction with what we have experienced of that Holy One. We have to have the heart of Moses, remember, after all the exodus and all the miracles, all the events that his reply was, "You have begun to show me." In fact, we can only have peace, rest, and contentment when we have hunger, thirst, and zeal. Because the peace of God that will guard your heart is the peace that comes when you are zealously hungering and thirsting to know Him evermore. So since zeal for His Father's house had consumed Him, He was in the rest of God. Remember, love is a passion for oneness? Well that passion can be explained in hunger, thirst, and zeal. So if you love Him because He first loved you, and you love God, you aren't content with what you have experienced of God, you have a hunger, a thirst, and a zeal to come into greater oneness with Him, which is accomplished by being transformed by the renewing of the mind, you see.

So, we have love from God, we know that love. We love God, which means we have a passion to come into oneness with Him and this un-renewed mind which is not one with Him has to go. Because that un-renewed mind, with its thoughts contrary to how God views reality, cannot be one with God. It's hostile to God; it's anti-God; thus, anti-Christ. In fact, hunger, thirst, and zeal are expressions of humility before this Holy God. "I want You; I need You; I must have You; and I must have evermore of You" is to be our heart before God. That is how humility behaves. Humility never translates as apathy. Only pride would say, "I got enough of God to suit me, got enough of God to get me by." You see that's a prideful attitude; but the humble attitude says, "this God, I have got to have more of." Why? Because He's the only thing of value in all of existence; He's the treasure in the field; He's the pearl of great value; for which I sell the field, for which I give up everything encountered as rubbish for the surpassing value of gaining the only thing in all of existence that has value. The Holy One. So when we have that humble attitude, then we access the grace of God; because He gives His grace to the humble and the grace of God then produces fruit and that fruit is then peace, rest, contentment, you see. But the peace of God will never guard your heart when you're in apathy toward God.

The next is joy. Well how strong was His vision? What did His vision produce? Hebrews 12:2 tells us – “for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” So His vision produced joy and His joy produced strength. Nehemiah 8:10 – “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” If you have no joy in the Lord, you will not have the strength to reject the lusts of the flesh. Because it’s the pleasures of the Lord that outweigh the pleasures of the flesh, that allow you to seek the One that gives you the greater pleasure. So long as I have more pleasure in entertaining lustful thoughts of adultery, that exceed the pleasure that I have of doing the will of God to be faithful to my wife, I will commit adultery. It’s only when I know that I demonstrate faithfulness to God, to model it to others by being faithful to my wife and feel the pleasure of that, that the pleasure of that outweighs the pleasure of adultery, you see. But if there is no pleasure here in doing the purposes of God, there will be more pleasure in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh which is adultery. So the reason we have adultery to such a degree, even in Christian families, is people are not experiencing the joy of the Lord. (Question to Buddy: “I hate to interrupt, but say that again; that’s important, say that again please.”) We are pleasure seekers. We are made that way and so long as the pleasures of the flesh such as adultery produce greater pleasure for us than does doing the will of God produce pleasure for us, then we will always go to the site of great pleasure which in that case is adultery. So the reason adultery is so common in Christian families is the pleasures of the Lord are so minimal. So the antidote is not: “I will not commit adultery”; the antidote is to come into His presence where there is fullness of joy at His right hand where there are pleasures forever—to begin to see the joy that God has in you, to know His love that magnetically attracts you, to experience His love, feel the joy of it, and then reject anything that interferes with that joy.

So Jesus was stating by His actions, remember? “I love you; and I would rather go through the Hell of the cross for you than to spend eternity without you; I love you that much.” He was saying “I’d rather have a relationship with you by paying the price for your sins than I would desire to hold your sins against you and be apart from you for all eternity. I love you that much.” That was His vision. He single mindedly and zealously clung to the vision for the joy of pleasing the Father and the joy of having you where He is for all eternity. Now can you envision holding on to a vision in the face of such torture? See the torture was real; the pain was real; He was paying for our sins and the wages of sin is death. The Father could not make a mockery of that by relieving His suffering. That would have made the cross into a sham. That would have been to give the appearance of suffering without suffering. There was no divine anesthesia here. That would have been to lie. Hebrews 6:18 says – “It is impossible for God to lie.” Because if we can understand His vision, then we can understand His joy and that will bring us joy, and that joy will become our strength and will empower us when our time comes to become a living sacrifice on our cross that we take up. But we will only take up that cross for the joy that is set before us. If there is no joy set before us, we will not take up our cross; and if we do not take up our cross, we will not manifest Jesus Christ to the rest of the human race. We will not take up our cross unless we see the joy that’s before us; and we will not see the joy before us unless we see the joy that was before Him. Because only then can we die for the joy before us. Just like Jesus. He’s not just our Savior, remember; He is our model. He is the truth; He is God; and He is there to model and to

tell us how God views everything else, including how to take up your cross. See, if all our energies are spent in avoiding our cross, we will never fulfill the purposes of God that He has for us as Christians.

So as with all things related to a Holy God, that God Who is “other than” anything else, words will always fall hopelessly short of fully expressing a spiritual truth. But words, even with their limitations, can give us a foretaste of the truth sufficient to empower us to holy living. Now one aspect of humility, remember, is to know that we never know fully. I Corinthians 8:2 – “If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.” So again, let’s take two words and use them to get the spiritual truth; not being bound by the choice of words, but looking for the spiritual truth that undergirds the words that I’m choosing to use. Those two words are happiness and joy. Happiness, remember, is a sense of well being that tends to be superficial, circumstantial, and temporary. But joy is a sense of deeper well being; it tends to be deeper, circumstance resistant and time prolonged. Joy, in fact, is that euphoria that occurs in the inner man when he is living in the knowledge of his God and how that God feels about him and what that God did for him, including specifically, the love of God; then all this is known by communion with God.

Next poster. Remember the cocoon of carnality. This is where we live in the flesh, where we are assessing everything; everything that happens to us in the light of these four variables: comfort, convenience, cost, and control. And any circumstance that happens on our hard drives, we are “pre-programmed”, if you will, to analyze them in those terms. Right away, we’re thinking how much discomfort will it cause me, what kind of inconvenience will it cost me, what kind of time and money will it cost me, what kind of control will I have to give up over the circumstance?

Next poster. Because the basis of happiness is the cocoon of carnality—happiness tends to be circumstance sensitive and time limited. But joy has its basis in communion with God. God doesn’t change. Our communion with God doesn’t have to change based on circumstances. Therefore, joy tends to be circumstance resistant and time prolonged. The fullness of joy has its basis in fullness of communion. Well, what is the fullness of communion? It’s oneness with God. That fullness, then of oneness with God (which is our goal), is circumstance independent and time eternal. We will experience that fully in Heaven, but in the meantime we’re to grow in the experience of it here on Earth. The state of happiness usually relates to our “playing defense” in life; as we labor to prevent any change in our circumstances, if those circumstances are producing happiness. And we labor to eliminate any circumstances that are interfering with our cocoon of carnality and thus, interfering with our happiness. But the state of joy leads us to play offense in life, as that joy based on communion with God independent of circumstance naturally overflows onto other people. We don’t focus on changing the circumstance; we focus on changing our stance in our circum. That is to say in our surroundings or whatever is going on in life. That’s why Paul and Silas, remember, in prison, in the stocks at midnight were singing praises unto the Lord; because their joy was based on communion with God, not based on circumstances.

Now having the joy of the Lord does not preclude empathy for others. Romans 12:15 – “Weep with those who weep”; but even as we weep with those who weep, based on our caring, we are sustained and we ultimately will sustain them by the undergirding of joy which constantly flows out of our knowledge of God and communion with God. That’s why again, Jesus showed us how to do it—how to balance the two views. John 11:35 – “Jesus wept.” Remember the background of why Jesus wept? Lazarus had died; He had tarried to let the body begin to decompose. He comes and He sees the family and friends of Lazarus weeping; so the Son of God does not give Himself a “bye” on experiencing the pain of others. He sees and weeps with those who weep even though He came to raise him from the dead. That’s the model of human empathy. John 15:11 – “These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full.” So He came to give them fullness of joy; but in the meantime, He wept with those who wept, you see. Because when you have only joy with no empathy, you appear hard and hardness does not testify of the caring of your God. But if you only feel empathy and only weep, you’re not testifying of your vision and the faithfulness of God for all eternity. So you weep with those who weep, but ultimately you’re driven and empowered by the joy of the Lord. John 17:24 – “For thou dost love me before the foundation of the world.” You see Jesus had joy because He was overflowing with the knowledge of the love of the Father for Him; and that knowledge of the love of the Father was circumstance independent; thus time eternal. So as Jesus spoke, so He lived, even as He died, on the cross. For the joy that was set before Him as He was ultimately to be restored to oneness with the Father after His period of forsakenness, you see. The joy was set before Him and it empowered Him to endure the travail of the cross.

So I think that maybe a minute is not enough to go further, I think I’ll call it a halt at that point. So again, thank you for listening.