

## The Cross of Christ – Part 8

Well, now we're going to begin to lay a foundation that prepares us to approach what I call the spiritual reality of the cross of Christ. Now we can only understand an event by understanding the backgrounds, the roles, and the relationships that participated in that event. Because no event can be interpreted in a vacuum. Jesus, even before the cross—even without the cross, had already demonstrated more humility and more love than we can even fathom. Susan will remind us of that by reading Philippians 2:5-8 – “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

We struggle, even with the call to be humble as human beings. But can you imagine, the Son of God, coming from Heaven itself, in the presence of the Father in oneness with the Father, voluntarily? To come to Earth in the form of a man as a vulnerable little bundle of flesh, a baby, voluntarily. To become a servant of man voluntarily...and all before the cross. So it's fine, of course, that we accentuate the cross, the seminal point in all of human history, but we need always remind ourselves that the Son of God had already demonstrated an unfathomable degree of humility to leave the glory of Heaven to come even to go to the cross. But then He went to the cross voluntarily to incur the wrath of God for us voluntarily, to pay the price for our sins voluntarily. Now you've heard of the movie, The Incredible Journey, but no journey can compare with that incredible journey from the glory of Heaven to the travail of the cross.

Now let's come to the revelation of the heart attitude just described. Now in my mind, this is what I call the mother lode of all Christianity. It's what I call the spiritual suffering of Jesus Christ that we're going to begin to approach. It's here that we can receive a revelation of the heart of God by looking at the heart of Jesus Christ, because if we've seen Him, we've seen the Father. But we have to look at His spiritual suffering on the cross in order to do so. So we've come to the heart of the cross that we will begin to approach today and go into in fullness next time that we meet. It's also a crossroad for us, because we'll either receive a revelation and walk in God's power transformed into His very likeness by the renewing of our minds, or we'll not receive the revelation and continue in what we, in large part, have done heretofore by fulfilling II Timothy 3:5 and continue to hold to a form of godliness while denying its power. We don't come to this point empty handed. I run through this just to remind you, we've been on a journey for some time to come to this specific point. We bathed in certain critical points. We looked at “in the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.” The Holiness of God, the sin of man, Hell in its horror, its reality, and then its beauty. We looked at Heaven and we need, of course, to bring all of that with us as we go on into the heart of the cross.

Then we moved on to look at the next poster, when we came to the foot of the cross, we prepared to land by realizing this is holy ground and we need to prepare our hearts to come. Then we looked at the suffering and travail of the God-man in the Garden of

Gethsemane. Then we looked at the “sweet suffering” of Christ - that suffering which is accepted for the greater pleasure of glorifying God. Then we looked at the targeted tears. “Don’t weep for Me, weep for yourselves and your children.” Then the forgiving of ignorance; because, remember, the ignorant are veiled and the veiled are simply who we were; and thus, our present reminder of the grace of God for us. Then we looked at paradise promised—the thief on the cross who gave more testimony in a few sentences than virtually anyone else in human history and we still talk about it 2,000 years later because it was so pregnant with meaning. We looked at the physical torture. But as we go forward, we’ll see that the physical torture is not even really the major element of the cross; but we need to bring all that with us as we go forward, because today we head into the point of where darkness fell.

Luke 23:44 – “And it was now about the sixth hour (which is noon) and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (which would be 3:00 pm).” Darkness fell at midday for three hours while Christ hung on the cross. Let’s go back to Amos 8:9 – “And it will come about in that day, declares the Lord God, that I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the Earth dark in broad daylight.” And then we’re reminded of the Scripture we’ve used before. Amos 3:7 – “Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.” Remember, foreknown, foretold, for faith; because one way to kindle faith within us is to see the prophecies of the ancient past come into fulfillment even hundreds of years later.

So, I don’t think we have any here who sits in the seat of the scoffer. But in the way we relate to scoffers, it’s helpful to remind ourselves of the following point: If someone questions the darkening of the sun at noon, it has nothing to do with the darkness at noon. To question the darkness is simply to strain at the gnat. And to strain at the gnat is simply the revelation that the questioner has not swallowed the camel. Well, what is that camel? Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.” That’s why we began there; because the set of the heart is established from that one verse forward, because if you have not fully swallowed Genesis 1:1 and all its implications, you will not swallow the darkness and you certainly will not swallow what happened in that darkness, because in the final analysis, no one ever debates a miracle. They’re always debating Genesis 1:1. Do you think that the God of Genesis 1:1 Who made the sun and billions more like it could not turn the darkness or the light on and off? That the same God Who said, “Let there be light” and there was light, could not say ‘Let there be darkness’ and there would be darkness?

So, let’s acknowledge our ignorance about this darkness, but at least let us not be ignorant because we ignore this darkness. Deuteronomy 29:29, remember, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things revealed belong to us.” So the secret things belong to the Lord. Well, what secret things? Well, there are many secret things; because God will always be mystery, remember? Because how could we, as finite created beings, with a peanut brain ever presume to fully understand omniscience? So God is a mystery. And one of the secret things is this darkness. There’s not a word of scripture in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John about what happened during this three hours of darkness. I Timothy 3:16 – “great is the mystery of godliness.” Now we must address

such mysteries with delicacy, carefully and avoid presumption. But I also believe that God is pleased when we desire to know His mysteries if our desire is to know Him and His ways, to fulfill our love for Him; and remember - love is a passion for oneness. So when you have a passion to be one with God, you cannot simply put the mysteries aside without pressing forward toward the mark to understand all the mysteries that God will reveal to you.

But it does not please God if we simply wish to speculate in order to play mind-satisfying, egotistical, theologic games. So if we're going to try to look into the darkness of the cross, we need night vision and those two things simply stated, we already know. They're related. John 14:16-17 – "He will give you a helper, the Spirit of truth." And Psalms 119:160 – "The sum of Thy Word is truth." So we need to have the Holy Spirit illuminate it for us in a way that we can understand. "And darkness fell." Now had not darkness fallen, this event would continue as it was. Namely being regarded as nothing more than one more death sentence for one more deserving criminal. But when darkness fell at midday, that explanation was no longer sufficient. Until then, men witnessing this event were secure in their interpretation of that event. But at the moment that darkness fell; can you imagine how that caravan of life moving along the highway of life was stopped? At that moment, the Holy One of Genesis 1:1 declared Himself. He declared His involvement in these unfolding events. He rang a bell to capture the attention of the whole human race in a way that could not be ignored. Since the Holy One is declaring Himself by ringing such a bell, then we should, of course, regard this as holy ground. Figuratively speaking, remember, "Take off your sandals, this is holy ground."

So what are some of the sandals that we need to take off? Well, we need to take off our preconceived notions, we need to take off thinking that we understand, thinking that we know because when we think we know, we don't know as we ought to know. If we want to know the Holy One and what He is conveying to us in this darkness, then we must leave behind anything that He doesn't want in His presence. Leave behind pride, leave behind judging Him, leave behind residual sin, leave behind self-righteousness, leave behind love of this world, leave behind fear of anything except Him. In short, the spiritual principle is this: we should leave behind everything that we know, from the Word of God, we're not going to take to Heaven with us. Because the Kingdom of Heaven, that spiritual state that is accessed on planet Earth that we call the "abundant life" from Scripture, cannot be accessed if we cling to that which cannot go to Heaven. Because the Kingdom of Heaven here on planet Earth is the operational principles that are operating in Heaven brought to planet Earth. But it cannot be accessed so long as we cling to things that will not be in Heaven. So we should not be double-minded about these events as we tend to be. How are we double minded? Because we claim to want the fruit of the spirit, claim to want the abundant life, while we tenaciously cling to things of this world that cannot operate in Heaven. So how can we access the Kingdom of Heaven here, if we cling to the ways of the world here? So we need to simply say, "Stop, no more of this." And that's what the darkness conveys to us, a reminder to us to stop; no more of this because if you're going to peer into the darkness, you've got to go *into* it and you can't go into it with an expectant heart to receive the revelations unless you leave behind things that God will not allow in His presence.

Now we, of course, will never fully explain this darkness and what it contained any more than we can explain creation. But remember? We thank God and that's a call for worship. We thank Him and praise Him that He's bigger than our understanding. Because when we worship only that which we understand, we are worshipping our understanding; because our understanding will always encapsulate our God. That leaves us in a position of self-worship by keeping us with understanding bigger than God. And recall the other corollary to that. We have begun to understand as finite beings when we seek to understand without having to understand in order to believe in a Holy God. So we need to maintain that heart attitude as... (Comment to Buddy: "Would you repeat that again?") Buddy: "You have me repeat that each time, Ed, and I'm always glad to. It's a paraphrase of "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean onto your own understanding." Because the person who says, I'll only worship that which I understand, will always have his understanding be bigger than his God. And that's just a variant of self-worship. So to the person who is on the spiritual pursuit, seeking the face of God, you have begun to understand that you're worshipping a Holy God, when you *seek* to understand (because that's what He wants you to do), without *having* to understand in order to believe and in order to operate in faith. Because our faith is in God, never in our understanding of that God.

Next poster. So, what could this darkness mean? Well without being wildly speculative, let's look at some possibilities. I've already alluded to the fact that it is a declaration from God. It's telling us that His ways are higher than our ways; that the mind of man cannot unravel this higher power that can make darkness fall on the face of the Earth at midday at any moment of His choosing. And if our minds cannot unravel the darkness, how can it unravel what took place in that darkness? That's why we're dependent on the Spirit of Truth to teach us what happened in that darkness, because those secret things belong to God. Now He will reveal what *He* desires for us to see and not necessarily all that we *ask* to see. Well, why is that? Well, for our protection as an act of love, that we may live. Well, how is that? Simply recall the story of Moses in Exodus 33:18-23 – Moses asked to see the glory of God. Moses received no reprimand from God for making that request. God did not refuse his request; but He only partially answered his request. Did He partially answer because of selfishness on the part of God? No, He partially answered as a form of mercy toward Moses. Because our God is a consuming fire and no man can look on His face and live. And when you ask to see the glory of God in His fullness, you're asking to be consumed by the judgment of God in fire. So He gave Moses a protected glimpse of His goodness, but not the fullness of gaze upon His glory because no man could do that and live. Moses' time on Earth and his mission on Earth were not yet completed. Had God fulfilled the request of Moses in full, to see His glory, then Moses would have been consumed by the God Who is a consuming fire upon which no man can look; and then his mission would have been cut short. That would not have been love; that would have been judgment. So God showed Moses mercy and that should be our attitude as we ask to gaze upon the face of God as we go into the darkness of the cross of Christ. It's not irreverent to ask, to see what happened in that darkness. It would be presumptive and would be irreverent to think that we could even bear to see fully what happened in that darkness. But what we want is, like Moses, to press on

toward the mark of the fullness of revelation that God can give us and rather than judging how much we're capable of seeing, let *God* be the judge of how much we're capable of seeing without being consumed. And what we want to do is, like Moses, to receive a sufficient glimpse of what happened in that darkness so that our faces become light to the rest of the human race; so that people look at us and say, 'surely he has seen God. Will you explain to me the reason for the hope that is within you?' So, also like Moses, may God in His mercy show us a protected glimpse so that we may continue to live to be earthen vessels of what we have seen in the darkness.

Secondly, the darkness itself is a form of mercy, that protected even the eyes of the wicked from witnessing the fullness of the horror that was about to unfold in that darkness. It's revealing that God did not shield their eyes from the fullness of the physical torture. Now how much greater must have been the spiritual torture in the darkness that is about to unfold that God Himself shielded its viewing from the eyes of all men? This was for only God to see, for no man could see it and live.

Next, to limit the expression of evil. This is God in His restraining grace; He even used the darkness to limit the expression of evil flowing from the hearts of men. Because the mockers and persecutors could persist in the expression of unrestrained evil so long as natural light dominated. But when natural light was taken away, and the supernatural took over the natural, and darkness fell, can you imagine the stillness on the lips of the mockers and persecutors? Then, I think that they were likely undone. Then their expression of evil, I think likely ceased. God, the Father in His restraining grace had simply said, 'stop—no more of this. I will take over and handle the punishment now and I need no earthen vessels to do so; in fact, there is no earthen vessel that could do so; so I will stop the function of any earthen vessel with the mocking and persecution of My Son. It will be up to Me from now on.'

Darkness is also symbolic of the wrath of God. Now this is understood by looking at Hell. Because to enter this darkness is to look at Hell. God expresses two kinds of wrath in Hell. Both are terrible and both are symbolized in different ways. The first type is the manifest flow of the fullness of the wrath of God. And that's symbolized by imagery that we can see—namely the lake of fire, and by God as a consuming fire. That is the presence of God in the fullness of the flow of His wrath in judgment. The second type is the wrath of God, but is symbolized entirely differently. This is the abandonment wrath of God. This is symbolized by darkness and not just darkness; outer darkness, darkness beyond what the human mind has ever experienced or could ever comprehend, darkness that transcends our understanding of darkness. It's an "other than" kind of darkness. That's the withdrawal of God in all of what we would regard as His positive attributes: The absence of His love, His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His communion—the outer darkness.

Now we must understand both of those in order to understand what happens in the darkness. Now here we have a paradox. Remember, a paradox is an apparent contradiction which may nevertheless be true. So I ask the rhetorical question, "Is God present in Hell?" Well, yes. Revelation 14:10 (speaking of the eternal judgment of

Satan) – “He will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.” The lamb is Jesus, the Son of God. The Lamb of God is present while pouring out wrath. He is present in His functioning as the fierce but righteous judge. Because remember all authority and all judging has been given to the Son. So is God absent in Hell? Well, yes. I mean throughout Scripture we read about outer darkness—cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Remember the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25: Those who were not ready when the bridegroom came were shut out of his presence. The door was closed. That’s the outer darkness—to be shut out from the presence of God. The complete absence of his essences as the passionate lover and all the things that flow out of the love of God, including grace, and mercy, and forgiveness, and communion. His grace is forever gone, that includes His grace that heretofore restrained the outpouring of His own wrath. Now to understand those considerations is to understand why we obligatorily studied Hell before coming to the cross; because the cross of Christ can only be understood based on the understanding of Hell. To refuse to look at Hell is to refuse to look at the cross and to refuse to look at what happened in the darkness of the cross.

Now did Jesus know, or did He enter the darkness in a state of “ignorance is bliss?” Well, I think He knew; I think He was forewarned. Recall the Garden of Gethsemane: Matthew 26:38-39 – “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” In verse 42 – “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.” Luke 22:42-44 – “Father, if Thou art willing remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done. Now an angel from Heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He was praying very fervently and His sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground at contemplation of what was going to occur.” Can you imagine being troubled unto death, perspiring drops of blood at the contemplation of what drinking from this cup was going to require? So what was that cup that He was talking about passing from Him? We saw it in Revelation 14:10 – “He will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger.” That cup is the wrath of God poured out in its fullness in eternal judgment. No wonder He’s perspiring blood. So I ask you, did Jesus believe in Hell? Why, I think so. He didn’t say ‘Father, thank you that You’re just kidding about what this cup will involve; that You’re just kidding about Hell; and that all of this is a divine joke.’ I don’t think anyone would be troubled unto death, perspiring drops of blood at the contemplation of a divine joke. The blood flowed, remember, from the One Who is truth; and truth remember, is what God is and how God views everything else. So the One Who is truth, Who is God, and is telling us how God views everything else is perspiring blood at the mere contemplation of what He is about to enter.

Next, this once in history darkness, called forth by a Holy God, that fell over the whole Earth was also symbolic of the travail that was occurring in the spirit of Jesus. This darkness, in His spirit, was because He was enduring for the first time, the absence of the light of communion with the Father. Now as with all things, consideration of one extreme, allows you the fullest understanding of the other extreme. So how great will the

darkness in the spirit of Jesus be when compared to the preceding life of oneness with God the Father? Previously, that oneness had been the light of His life. So let's look at that antecedent relationship between the Father and Son that existed until now when Jesus, like the unfaithful servant, is about to be cast into the outer darkness. Let Jesus describe it. John 4:34 – “My meat, my food, my nourishment is to do the will of Him Who sent Me.” John 5:30 – “I do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge. I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me.” John 5:19 – “I can only do what I see the Father do.” John 8:29 – “I always do the things that are pleasing to the Father.” John 12:50 – “I speak just as the Father has told Me to speak.” John 14:31 – “That the world may know that I love the Father.” And John 15:9 – “Just as the Father has loved Me.” John 17:22 – “that they may be one (that's us) just as We are One (that's the Father and the Son).”

So remember love, that passion for oneness? That's where they existed—in that oneness. Colossians 3:14 – “Love which is the perfect bond of unity.” That's what the Father and Son shared. That's what had always existed and that's how they had always been one. But we're about to enter the stage of the cross when that will no longer be the circumstance. But if you want to understand the darkness; we want to know where we're going with it and we'll do that next time. But meditate on where He's starting from—that position of oneness with the Father as He even enters the darkness. Because that sense of loss will magnify what you experientially feel as you go through the circumstance. But we'll pick it up next time; because today I see my time is up. So as always, I thank you for yours.