

## Your Cross – Part 2

Welcome to Your Cross, part 2, May 23, 2007. In the Kingdom of God, we came into Your Cross. We began last week laying the foundation of your cross and we'll pick up in the middle of that lesson and carry forward hopefully to the end of that lesson today. Remember the key points from last week that every moment of our Christian lives we are engaged in a battle; there are two kingdoms at war; it is in the spirit realm; it's played out here on Earth through us as earthen vessels; and it's, of course, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the head of one kingdom and Satan, the prince of this world, the head of the other kingdom. Then the battle is fought in our minds over every thought and that's why we're told by our Savior to capture every thought in obedience to Him. And the fundamental battle over every thought is simply coming to grips with what is truth. So what determines the outcome of that struggle as we in our thought life try to assess what is truth. Well, that outcome is answered by asking another question. What ruler do we follow; because we can only follow one and we follow what we hallow. To hallow, remember, means to hold in highest esteem. Simply stated, what we do not hallow, we will not follow. That's at least one reason, I believe, it's in the Lord's model prayer, hallowed be Thy name; because if we're not regarding the name of our Savior as hallowed, we are not going to obey Him. And the reason, when Jesus would say, why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say, is simple to answer, they were not hallowing Him. They were not operating in awe and reverence. And remember, we're taught that in Scripture early on that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of everything. It's the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of understanding, the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of everything including in our New Testament Christian walks.

So if we do not hallow God, does that mean then that we will hallow Satan? Well, no, not directly. Satan is too subtle for that. Remember that he is the father of lies. So Satan will simply have us follow him while not believing that we are following him, while believing that we are good little Christians. Well, how does he do that? By having us hallow self; when we hold ourselves in high esteem, then we follow self. So the lie that the father of lies would have us function in is that we can follow Jesus and follow self simultaneously. In other words, he has us believe that we are following Jesus while remaining unchanged in self worship, refusing to deny self, take up our cross and truly follow Jesus. Because Jesus undeniably said, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me. Satan says through the agent of our thought life, you are really okay as you are, I'm okay, you're okay, you're better than most people around you including certainly most Christians. If God really loves you, wouldn't He want you to be comfortable and happy? You could do it except for other people and circumstances; no God of love would really want you to suffer. God said that, but it doesn't seem to work that way for you. God will excuse your sin because He knows your heart. God meant that generally, but your situation is obviously specific and unique; and therefore, an exception to the general rule. You, in fact, are a good Christian. Thus, Satan, the father of lies, distorts the truth in order to have us believe that we can follow self and follow God simultaneously. But God says in Matthew 6:24 – No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to the one and despise the other. And each thought is really the same battle. God says in His Word, no man can serve two masters. Deny self; take up your cross and follow Me. Satan says you can satisfy God and self.

So what is truth? Is truth how God views reality or is truth how you view what God said? Your answer is to either use or throw away the keys to the kingdom of Heaven that we've been given in the Word of God. If your answer is, truth is how I view what God says, then you bind symbolically the Kingdom of Heaven within you; because it is within you according to the Word of God, and it is bound in Heaven, not released in you to flow through you out into the natural world. If your answer is contrary, that is to say, truth is in fact how God views reality and nothing else, including my opinion of it, then you begin the process of the outer shell dying, self being denied, the key to the Kingdom of Heaven being used, the Kingdom of Heaven being loosed on Earth through you as an earthen vessel and loosed in Heaven to flow through you with the power of God backing it up. Humility makes adjustments to do that. Pride makes excuses while giving reasons not to do that. So that gives us some background about the battle in our thought life. So how do we overcome the evil one, the father of lies, in this battle?

Next poster. Next poster, we've already somewhat covered that. Revelation 12:11 – And they overcame him (this is speaking of Satan). Remember the father of lies, the prince of this world, the accuser of the brethren? They overcame him because of the blood of Lamb, because of the word of their testimony and they did not love their life even unto death. So let's take those in sequence. Because of the blood of the Lamb; now we want all of that. The good news is we do have that. We want to feel accepted by God and we are. We want to feel forgiven and we are. We want to escape the wrath of God including Hell and we have. We want to apply all of the blood of Jesus Christ to all of these issues and stop. But the verse doesn't stop there; it continues...because of the word of their testimony. Now that can have two meanings. That can include the testimony of how God has worked in you specifically. We want to do that, give our testimony, if it doesn't upset anyone. So we want some of that testimony of the Word. That also includes testifying of the Word of God itself. We want some of that—namely the part that doesn't offend and doesn't call for changes in our present attitudes and behaviors. But the Scripture continues. They did not love their life even unto death. That calls for denying self, taking up our cross, and following Jesus even unto death while considering our lives of no value. We want none of that.

So a summary statement assessing how to overcome the evil one is the following. We want all of the blood, some of the Word, and none of the cross. Therefore, we do not overcome the evil one, at least in our present state. We also don't overcome him by rebuking him. Scripture does tell us that we overcome him by resisting him, but remember, that Scripture in James says submit to the Lord, resist the devil and he will flee. Many people focus all their attention on resisting the devil and bypass the part about submitting to God. But in fact, they're connected. If you're not submitting to God, you cannot resist the devil. So we resist him by walking in the fullness of these three stages. Yes, we have and we want all of the blood of the Lamb; but we're to walk in the fullness of the Word of our testimony—not only what God has done in our lives through Jesus Christ, but also walking in the testimony declaring His Word in opposition to anything contrary to His Word. And taking that to such a degree that we do not love our own lives in comparison with what the Word of God declares. To truly say, to live is Christ and to die is gain; and resist, through the Word of God by taking out the sword of the Spirit, to oppose any vain imagination, any speculation, any thought that rises up in opposition to how God views that reality. So to understand these things is to understand the battle, to understand the battleground, and to begin to understand our cross.

So let's carry it forward by looking at several categories of suffering that we will come to grips with as a Christian. There's flesh and blood suffering, suffering that is common to man. Even after salvation we will continue to be in the world. We still have flesh and blood bodies that are not excluded from suffering including eventually facing physical death because it is appointed unto men once to die and that applies also to born again Christians. If that were not true, then we would live forever on planet Earth in our present bodies. It would be as if we already had our glorified bodies before Scripture tells us we will get our glorified bodies which is the Rapture which is just before the Tribulation. This body is already corrupted and that corruption does not change with salvation. That's why when He speaks of the Rapture, it says you'll put off the corruptible and put on the incorruptible. But we're still in corruptible bodies, so therefore, we will have flesh and blood suffering even independent of our walk as Christians. It is true that God is sovereign. In His sovereignty, He can intervene in this suffering any time, anywhere, in any way to suit His divine purposes. He can intervene by preventing suffering; He can intervene by curing any suffering. But we, as Christians, are to rest in God in what's called the Sabbath rest of God in which we're to live and dwell, not to rest whenever we have freedom from suffering. Here we are amazed at the suffering allowed by God as we see through a glass dimly. But when we see fully, face to face, my best guess is we will be more amazed at the suffering prevented by God and of which we were completely unaware while walking through our lives while here on planet Earth.

So what is truth? In the midst of your flesh and blood suffering, what is truth? Is it, A: Exodus 33:19? I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. John 16:33 – In the world, you will have tribulation. II Corinthians 4:16 – The outer man decays. Hebrews 9:27 – It is appointed unto men once to die. Are those Scriptures a sample of truth, or is it, B?: You are suffering because there is no God. If there is a God, He doesn't love you or He wouldn't be allowing you to suffer. If He loves you, He obviously is not powerful enough to intervene, to stop your suffering. God is punishing you because of your failure to walk the ideal Christian life. It is simply unfair that God would let suffering like this occur. And if you only had faith, you would not be suffering. So which is truth? Group A or group B?

The second category is empathy. And this means sharing the feelings of others as they suffer; because we are called to have soft, tender, caring hearts—not to have cold, hard, unfeeling hearts. And I'm speaking predominantly to myself out of this group; because you know that scientific minds and physicians are taught to suppress emotions so as not to lose rational control over the logical analysis of every medical situation. So I've been well trained over decades not to have empathy. We're called to minister to them. Now the degree to which we will minister to people in their pain is at least somewhat related to the degree with which we can feel their pain. Becoming a Christian means tearing down the walls that we have built to insulate ourselves from the suffering of others. Well, to what degree are we to tear down the walls? Well, as always, Jesus Who is truth, is a testimony of how God views reality in the situation about empathy. John 11:33-35 – When, therefore, Jesus saw them weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, was troubled, and Jesus wept. Now remember the setting. He was coming to raise Lazarus from the dead. That's why I regard this as the greatest example of empathy in the Bible. Jesus foreknew that He was coming to raise Lazarus from the dead. He had intentionally tarried long enough for the body to begin to rot so that the power of God would be evident in this situation. But He did

not allow the foreknowledge of what He was coming to do, relieve suffering, to insulate Him from feeling the suffering. So He wept because they wept. What greater example of empathy could we have? So what is truth? Romans 12:15 – Weep with those who weep. I Corinthians 12:26 – And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with him. Is that truth or is it B? They brought it on themselves. There's nothing meaningful that you can do. If God loves them, He will take care of it and they won't suffer one bit more than He wants them to suffer. Probably punishment for their sin. You have enough problems of your own. If they had faith like you, they wouldn't be suffering. So is it option A or option B? Which is truth?

Forgiving. This means to let go of past offenses. Our flesh self wants to hang onto past offenses until it obtains relief and it obtains relief in one of two ways. By seeing our transgressor suffer more than He has caused us to suffer (and we call that justice). So we plead for grace for ourselves and justice for our transgressor. By having our transgressor admit to others that he was wrong all along and that we were right all along; because our flesh always has a need to be thought right by other people. The flesh always wants vindication in the eyes of man. But a Christian is called to forgive. We are to obtain relief by dying to the need for relief; letting go of past offenses causes suffering to our fleshly selves. But we're to let go of past offenses because they are just that. They are past. We can only worship God in the here and the now. And as long as we are living in unforgiveness, we are locked in the past, not in the here, not in the now; and thus, cannot worship God. Unforgiveness precludes worship. That's why Jesus said if you come to the altar and have anything against your brother, go and settle things with your brother and be reconciled to him and then come back; because Jesus knows as long as you're writhing in unforgiveness, you're living in the past, contemplating revenge in the future. But you cannot worship God while you hold attitudes like that in the here and the now. So what is truth? A: Luke 23:34 spoken, remember, as our Savior hung on the cross dying for the sins of all humanity including yours – forgive them for they know not what they do. So if you ever think that your circumstance is too tough to let go; and thus, forgive, then just consider your circumstance with the circumstance of the cross and see. Or is B true? Well, you can follow Jesus without forgiving them. After all, it's not justice for them to get away with what they did to you. In fact, you are God's instrument to bring justice to them. Don't you know the Bible says an eye for an eye?

Suffering because you are a Christian, what we call persecution; because you, now as a Christian, march to a different drummer. You now represent God to the world. Evil hates good. As long as you were in the world, behaving like the world, then the world took no offense. So you were not persecuted. But now that you remain in the world, while no longer being of the world, then the world will notice and will take offense. Persecution of one sort or another will come. They may not nail you to a physical cross, but in our society it will come with sarcasm, with ridicule, with putdowns, with questioning your intellectual capacity or lack thereof, with ostracism socially, or the like. Persecution will come. You cannot be a Christian without declaring that Jesus is the way. You cannot declare Jesus as the way without the world taking offense. The world cannot take offense without persecuting you because that is the way of the world. If you are right, then they must be wrong. So they can't accept what you say as right without becoming defensive and then offensive about how wrong that makes them appear to be. They will then likely, some of them, become aggressive about that confrontation; because their goal at that point on becomes to try to silence you.

So what is truth? Luke 10:3 – Behold I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. You like that verse? John 15:20 – If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. John 16:2 – An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. Revelation 6:11 (the view of the martyrs in Heaven) – And they were told that they should rest; because the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been should be completed also. More martyrs to come. Matthew 10:34 – Do not think that I came to bring peace on the Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. See, peace on Earth is vertical. We have peace on Earth in our vertical relationship to God because we're reconciled to God; thus, have peace with God; our war with God is over. But our war on Earth begins. So the peace is within as a fruit of the Spirit. But there is no peace outside yourself on the world because Jesus came to divide the human race. He came to split parents from children. He came to split brothers and sisters; because the only way you cannot be split with the world is to live your life as if Jesus isn't true and isn't the truth and isn't the way. Romans 12:14 – Bless those that persecute you. Are all those truth; or is this truth? I thought Jesus was the prince of peace. Are you not to be a peacemaker instead of divisive? Who are you to say what is true? You shouldn't take that kind of abuse from anybody. You must not be a very good Christian witness or you wouldn't provoke such antagonism. Condemn them! That's what God would do. Provoking that kind of resistance must mean that you have somehow missed God's will for you. So which is truth? Group A or Group B?

Dying to self. Self denial. This is your cross. It's the heart of the matter. It cuts across all the other types of suffering. If we can grasp this, then we can grasp all other types of suffering. And it's unavoidable that that's what we're called to do. We can't proclaim Jesus as the truth and the way while resisting this way of deny self, take up your cross and follow Me. He has given us that key to the Kingdom of Heaven. So if we want to know why the abundant life has not been released through us, it's in some way because we have thrown away the keys until they have become rusty. This key is to release the Kingdom of Heaven from within you out onto planet Earth. His cross brought us into the Kingdom and that is to determine our lives thereafter. But our cross and our embracing or rejecting it determines our quality of life in the Kingdom while we remain here on planet Earth. Salvation was one crossroad; we've already come to that crossroad. That is to say to take the road of the cross of Christ rather than some other road. But now we're in the process of purification—what's called progressive sanctification and that's another cross-road. Except this time, the crossroad is to take up our cross or not. We will either deny self and take up our cross or we'll take up self and deny our cross. It is one or the other because you cannot serve two masters. So what is truth?

Matthew 16:24 – Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me; coupled with John 10:10 – I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. We want the abundant life without denying self, taking up our cross and following Him. But there's a process. So is that truth or is this truth? What are you, some kind of masochist? Didn't He come that your joy may be full? That doesn't sound like joy to me. Surely God would want you happy. So in the last two times, we began to look at our cross, to lay a foundation. We began to understand it as a battle; and remember, the battle in the Kingdom is a lifestyle, not an event. We like to think of an occasional battle separated by long periods of time of relative tranquility. But the battle is a lifestyle, not an event. It's an orientation in the spirit realm; because the battle

between Christ and antichrist never ceases, not for one moment, anywhere, any place, including in your thought life.

We looked at the subcategories of suffering. We reminded ourselves that the battle is spiritual albeit played out in the physical realm. The battle is over what is truth related to every thought in your mind. Each individual thought is simply another skirmish in the global battle. And with each thought, our will is involved. We will either win the skirmish by capturing that thought in obedience to Christ and how He views reality, or we will choose to be antichrist. We like to reserve that term for the great person antagonizing and opposing Christ in the end times; but when we now choose anything other than capturing the present thought in obedience to Christ, we are functioning in the kingdom of antichrist. And we do that in one of two ways: through ignorance (and certainly this series in some part will correct that) or laziness; because we know if we were to focus our attention on what the Bible says about what's going on in the spirit realm, it would call for our engagement every moment of our lives. So the way to escape that is not to know that. But remember we're guilty of two things: that which we know and don't do and that which we don't know because we refuse to know. And we are ignorant of only one thing: whatever we ignore. And ignoring is an active verb. So we think of ignorance as a passive state; but it's a very aggressive state; because we're ignorant of what we ignore and ignore is an active verb. So, either ignorance or laziness; or we actively join the rebellion of Satan by determining that we, the creature, can successfully rebel against our Creator by judging that truth is how I view what my Creator said rather than truth being what God said. And not only that we can successfully rebel against Him, but that we will be better off for having done so. And that's nothing more than to continue in self worship; it's nothing more than to continue in self determination while judging God, judging your thoughts as higher than His thoughts, and so on.

So we've looked at Your Cross, the foundation of it; because if we don't understand the spiritual battle in which we exist, we will not follow through with anything else about deny self, take up your cross, and follow Me. So the next time that I speak, we'll begin to look at Your Cross, the mechanism of it; to look in the microscopic way right down to each thought level as to how this plays out as we function in the Kingdom of God; because we can never win the battle, if you will, while forfeiting 99.9% of the skirmishes in our thought life. So I hope you come back next week. Thank you for listening.